Lake Garda

Cultural Holiday

Garda Concierge Guides
A holiday on Lake Garda offers various opportunities, not least that of pursuing one’s own cultural interests. From Prehistory to this day and age, from literature to fine arts, from historical residences to fortresses – GardaConcierge offers a guide for all holiday destinations and archaeological sites that are not to be missed during a holiday on Lake Garda!

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Museums on Lake Garda

Lake Garda offers various options for those who would like to further get to know the historical and artistic culture, food and wine and the traditions of the region. These are our ideas for a museum visit at an affordable price on Lake Garda.

MAG Museo Alto Garda – Riva del Garda

The acronym MAG stands for Museo Alto Garda, which comprises two museum buildings, among the most important in the Lake Garda area: the museum in the Rocca of Riva del Garda and the Galleria Civica G. Segantini inside Arco’s Palazzo dei Panni.

The museum houses three permanent exhibitions alongside temporary exhibitions. It also offers the “INvento” tour for children and families. The Pinacoteca art gallery displays regional works of the fine arts from the Late Middle Ages to the 19th century, while the archaeology section lets visitors explore the area’s finds that range from the Middle Paleolithic to the Late Middle Ages. The third permanent exhibition depicts historical events around the area of Riva del Garda and the Sarca, the main river flowing into Lake Garda, in chronological order – from Prehistory to the Second World War.

The Galleria Civica G. Segantini is situated in the 17th century Palazzo dei Panni and houses a permanent exhibition of the Pointillist painter Giovanni Segantini from Arco. The art gallery, now closed for renovation works, will reopen in March 2015 and then continue its cooperation with Rovereto’s MART Museo of modern and contemporary art. The cooperation sets out to make visitors more acquainted with the city of Arco and the artist Segantini.

The museum is open daily (apart from Monday) from 10 am to 6 pm from September to June, and in July and August from 3:30 to 10 pm. Entrance is free; guided tours are offered on request. Close by there are carparks. Further information on entrance tickets is available on the MAG website (www.museoaltogarda.it).

Olive Oil Museum

On the shore of Lake Garda, in Bardolino’s Cisano district, is the Cisano oil factory (Oleificio Cisano), where an olive oil museum is based. The museum, inaugurated at the end of the 80s, registers 50 000 visitors per year. It takes visitors on an exploration of oleiculture in the Mediterranean from antiquity to this day and age, as well as the machines for olive harvest and olive oil production from the 18th century. A perfectly functioning oil mill with a water wheel and an oak wood lever press are also among the tools on display. The museum includes a small shop where visitors can acquire products from the Cisano oil factory and Lake Garda: olive oil, vinegar, grappas and spirits, wine and cosmetics from natural extracts.

We would like to remind you that the museum, which can be visited individually without charge, is open from 9 am to 12:30 pm and 2:30 to 7 pm on weekdays, and in the morning on Sundays and public holidays. Half of it is barrier-free. Guided tours (liable to a cost) for groups are offered, and video guides are available in various languages (Italian, German, English, French and Dutch). Further information is available on the museum website (www.museum.it). The museum is easily identifiable because of its location on Gardesana street. It boasts a fenced carpark with about ten parking spaces.

Wine Museum

Again in Bardolino, the Cantina Fratelli Zeni winery in Via Costabella houses the wine museum. It is subdivided into various sections that each focus on a a different aspect of the production chain – from winegrowing to the final bottling of the finished product.
The first area concentrates on the processes of winegrowing and producing and puts old and new wine processing machines on display. It also exhibits different animal drawn ploughs as well as pumps and bellows with sulphur- and copper-based pesticides traditionally used for pest control. In the second area, grape processing tools are on display, among them scales and two winemaking implements, the first a mechanical one from the beginning of the last century and the second a manual one from the Middle Ages. The next section is dedicated to wine production and houses an ancient wine press, a few wine pumps and different corking machines. There are also areas dedicated to cooper’s tools, an exhibition of old winemaking machines and, finally, a section on bottling, the last phase of the production process. The last section is exciting in that it is located in the area where the winery’s wine is really bottled. The wine museum can be visited without charge and is open the whole year round – from November to mid March with the following winter opening hours: from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm in the morning and from 2:30 to 6:30 pm in the afternoon. The summer opening hours from mid March to October go from 9 am to 1 pm and 2:30 to 7 pm. The complex, which boasts a carpark, can also be visited in groups. There are tailored offers on request and at a charge, among them wine tours and tastings. For further information, we recommend you visit the website of the wine museum (www.museodelvino.it).

Museum in the Castle of Torri del Benaco
The Scaliger castle on the lakeside in Torri del Benaco houses this museum, in which a series of finds and objects testify to the artisan and industrial history of the city. From the entrance, where a well with a yellow marble well curb is located, visitors have access to the defence tower adjoining the tower, now site of the museum. The museum consists of various museum halls, each dedicated to one theme. In the hall of the caulkers – artisans responsible for shipbuilding and maintenance – visitors can see their tools, among them three planes, various gimlets and saws as well as three axes, the cutting tool representative of the caulkers. Another hall is dedicated to olive oil, which – together with wine – is the regional product par excellence; inside there are machines for olive oil extraction and production, while outside visitors can see an olive oil mill from the last century. The hall dedicated to fishing is subdivided in various sections. It displays fishing equipment, from various nets whose materials, loops and types of use vary according to the fish caught, to tools for depth sounding. Another hall focuses on the fishing guild “Antichi Originari” founded in the Middle Ages. Here, visitors can – among other objects – explore a series of documents and photos that tell their story. At the centre of the next hall, which looks back on the history of Torri del Benaco, is a model of the town. The last section of the exhibition, located in the attic, houses cave paintings from the area. Visitors to the museum can also pay a visit to the Limonaia. The marvellous lemon house testifies to the cultivation of this citrus fruit in one of the northernmost regions of the Mediterranean. The museum at the Scaliger castle in Torri is open from April to October with varying opening hours: from April to mid June and from mid September to the end of October from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm and 2:30 to 6 pm and from mid June to mid September from 9:30 am to 1 pm and 4:30 to 7:30 pm. For further information on visits and entrance, visitors can consult the museum website (www.museodelcastelloditorridelbenaco.it). Behind the castle, there is a rather large carpark (at a charge).

Paper Museum
Inside the centre of excellence of the Paper Mill Valley Foundation (Fondazione Valle delle Cartiere), the paper museum is located. The museum, inaugurated in June 2007, is one of the most important sites in Northern Italy when it comes to industrial archaeology. The first evidence of paper mills or paper manufacturers in the Toscolano-Maderno area dates back to the 14th century. Since then, the area, also referred to as “Paper Mill Valley”, has dedicated itself entirely to paper production. Legend has it that the construction of the first paper mill was due to a shipwrecked boat whose sail was washed overboard into one of Toscolano’s bays. There it got soaked in water and was then dried and compressed by the sun in a way that made it suitable to write on. At the instigation of the city of Toscolano-Maderno, the paper museum was set up in the last paper mill to cease production. Its design is that of a study centre of paper and print production, with sections subdivided according to themes and procedures, as well as workshops and conference rooms. On request, groups can visit the museum year round. It is open daily from 10 am to 6 pm in the months from April to September and on Saturdays and Sundays from 10 am to 5 pm in the month of October. The Paper Mill Valley can be reached by car – visitors can park along the street. Further information regarding visits and entrance ticket fees can be found on the museum website (www.valledellecartiere.it).

Museum of Lake Garda
The Museum of Lake Garda (Museo del Lago di Garda) is located in the borough of Garda, more precisely inside the Palazzetto delle Esposizioni. It assembles finds and materials that testify to the customs and traditions of the Lake Garda area. From an original collection of objects that tell the stories of historical events, the collection has expanded and was finally turned into a museum in 2011. After a short closure time, it reopened to the public on 1 February 2015. The museum is situated on two floors, the first of which is dedicated to land, the second to water. On the lower floor, objects and tools from the agricultural sector, the crafts, livestock farming, extraction and folklore are on display; on the upper floor, fishing tools are on show, among them nets, harpoons and hooks. The museum is open in the afternoons from Friday and Sunday from 3 to 6 pm and can also be visited in the mornings from 10 am to 12:30 pm on Saturdays. The Museum of Lake Garda can easily be reached on foot; there is a carpark not too far away. For further information on entrance and guided tours, visitors can consult the website of the city of Garda (www.comune.garda.vr.it).
Various settlements and fortresses testify to the history of Lake Garda as a strategic crossroads. Here are the travel suggestions from the GardaConcierge staff for the fortified residences, citadels and strongholds on and around Lake Garda.

**Arco Castle**

Arco castle is the first building visitors from the north, or the Trentino, will come across. It is a fortress in a special setting, with the castle perched atop a steep rock above Lake Garda. The date of its construction can only be estimated: the structure of the castle seems to date back to the 6th century AD, while the construction itself has been dated to around 1000 AD. Castle and town both owe their name to the Arco family, the rulers of the area in the 13th century. Due to its stonework, the castle was impregnable for centuries despite various attacks by rival families and enemies such as the Republic of Venice. Nevertheless, its decline began between the 15th and 16th century, when the counts of Arco preferred residences around the market square, due to their better location. Although several renovation works were carried out throughout the centuries, the decisive restoration took place at the end of the 20th century and the towers, cisterns and inner rooms of the castle can be visited today.

Arco castle can be reached via a short walk from the main street, where a carpark is located. It is open throughout the year, with daily summer opening times (April – September) from 10 am to 7 pm and winter opening times (November – February) from 10 am to 4 pm. The castle is open daily from 10 am to 5 pm in the months of March and October, but only on Saturdays and Sundays from 10 am to 4 pm in January. There are guided tours and discounts for groups. For further information, we recommend visiting the Arco town website.

**Riva del Garda Citadel**

Going South, our tour of the area’s ancient castles leads to Riva del Garda, where on the lake we find the austere Rocca. This building has seen various changes over the centuries: when construction started in the 12th century, the four corner towers were higher than the rest of the building. They were, however, reduced to the height of the roof – with the exception of the keep – under Austrian rule. The alteration and enlargement works followed each other over the course of time, varying depending on the signorie and rulers governing the town: not only the Scaliger and Visconti family, but also the Republic of Venice and the prince-bishops of Trento, among them Bernardo Clesio. Access to the building, which is partly in brick, partly in stone, is via a small bridge that divides the moat surrounding the castle. Due to renovation works carried out recently, the Rocca now houses the Civic Museum of Riva del Garda and a part of the Museo Alto Garda (MAG), where objects testifying to the artistic and cultural history of the area are on display.

The Rocca and the museum inside are open throughout the year: from 10 am to 12:30 pm in the morning and 1:30 pm to 6 pm in the afternoon. During the winter months, the Rocca is closed on Monday. It is open daily from July to September. There are guided tours for both individuals and groups; the MAG website features more detailed information. The square in front of the entrance can be reached on foot and there is a large carpark not far away.

**Malcesine Castle**

From the province of Verona, visitors drive down the eastern shore of Lake Garda to the next tour stop, Malcesine castle. The building is set in an elevated position on a rock spur with a view of Lake Garda. It seems to have...
Torri del Benaco Castle
Visitors reach Torri del Benaco after a 25 km ride south on the Gardesana street, along Lake Garda. Even if some finds indicate that the Torri area could have been a Roman camp, the castle's structure and stonework – still partly visible in the old town and along the Gardesana – seem to date back to the 10th century. Like Malcesine castle, Torri castle has also experienced the rule of the Scaliger family, who had the building renovated and rebuilt, followed by the Viscont and the Republic of Venice. Under the rule of Venice in the 15th century, the building’s decline began, culminating in the destruction of the stonework to make room for a limonaia, or lemon house, which still stands today. With strong support from the local borough, renovation works started in 1980. Today, the castle houses a museum in which objects and finds testify to the artisan and industrial history of the town.

The Scaliger castle of Torri del Benaco is easy to reach on foot from the carpark directly behind it. The castle's website features information on the visit and opening times.

Rivoli Veronese Fort
Fort Wohlgemuth – also known as “Forte Rivoli” – sits atop a hill in Rivoli Veronese, east of the lake shore. It is named after an Austrian general who excelled during the 1848 campaign. The construction dates back to the middle of the 19th century, when the fort, made from local building stone and brick, was built to protect the area’s lines of communication. The main body houses two cylindrical casemates, placed on top of each other, in which 17 cannon were stored. The fort is the seat of the Walter Rama museum. It is dedicated to military history and presents documents and finds from the fort’s martial past – with an area on the First World War – as well as uniforms and collar badges, while different cannon are on display in the outdoor area.

Fort Wohlgemuth can be reached on foot without difficulty from the centre of Rivoli, where visitors can leave their car. It is open on Sundays from 2.30 to 7 pm and, on request, on other days for groups. Further details are to be found on the museum website.

Pastrengo Forts
There is a group of fortifications not far away from Rivoli Veronese, further along the Adige river. They were built shortly after Fort Wohlgemuth. Both were however built by the Austrians and share the same characteristics. The forts mentioned – Degenfeld, Benedek, Nugent and Leopold – are all connected with each other by a tunnel. The four forts share remarkable similarities: all boast outdoor squares, on which casemates, ammunition depots and offices were located. Today, these forts are privately owned. Fort Nugent (today Fort Poggio Pol) and Fort Leopold (today Fort Poggio Croce), however, house restaurants and can still be visited.

Lazise Castle
Our itinerary takes us further west and back to the shore of Lake Garda, to Lazise with its medieval castle. Its construction dates back to the 9th century, but as with many other buildings in the area, its enlargement, renovation and contemporary form are due to the Scaliger family. The castle was once surrounded by walls, of which only the southern and northern part are preserved. There are thirteen towers and three main entrances from the town along these walls. Lazise castle has a square layout with two entrances. Both gates, each with a double door wing, can be reached via a drawbridge leading across the moat. Of the towers, the castle keep stands out because of its size and imposing appearance. The keep, made from brick, has a 2 m high tower base and ends with protruding merlons. Lazise castle was acquired by the Buri family at the end of the 19th century; its renovation is thanks to them. Later, other works were carried out to build a park. Among these, the drainage of the inner harbour – carried out in the course of cultivation works – and the creation of an artificial hill south of the castle are worth mentioning.

The part of the castle close to the walls is well-preserved and can be visited today. There are various carparks close to the entrance into town.

Peschiera Fortress
On their journey southward along the lake, visitors come to Peschiera, where Lake Garda flows into the Mincio river. Due to its geographical position, this area has always been of strategic interest. Indeed, the fortification of the town of Peschiera, in its contemporary form, dates back to the 16th century. Visitors can access the south-western part of the fortress via the Porta Braccia, crossing a bridge from which the fortified town looms up. Inside the fortification, there are buildings from various periods: the military hospital dates back to the middle of the 19th century, as does the San Martino church, which was built on a Romanesque foundation. Apart from Roman remains, there is the fortress, which was enlarged by the Scaliger family and renovated during Venetian and Habsburg rule.
other side of the so-called Canale di Mezzo, the most important branch of the Mincio river, visitors find the Austrian Palleria, once a storehouse for cannonballs, and the artillery barracks. These house the library and the town archive, while offering a view of the Parco Catullo. The Franciscus I barracks, seat of the police academy, and the Palazzo del Comando of the fortification, both from the Austrian period, are nearby. Visitors can cross the Canale di Mezzo using two bridges, the more westerly of the two leading to the town hall, located in the old cavalry barracks. The second access to the fortified town leads from the left shore of the Mincio river across two bridges to the Porta Verona, which features a lion of Saint Mark.

The route inside the town walls partly leads along footpaths; there are information panels at several points along the way, for example at the Roman excavation sites. For further information on the Peschiera fortress, visitors are invited to consult the town’s website.

**Sirmione Castle**

Going west from Peschiera, visitors reach Sirmione on Lake Garda where, on the tip of the peninsula, a castle is located. Today, Sirmione belongs to the province of Brescia. The castle’s construction in the late Middle Ages, however, was commissioned by the Scaliger family, who were the lords of a territory that went beyond the present-day province of Verona. The castle was built on pre-existing foundation walls, while its contemporary form as a fortification with merlon walls is due to the Scaliger family. It can be reached via a drawbridge that looks onto the languet extending into the lake. The stonework has been built in various construction phases. The inner harbour was created during the last phase, in the middle of the 14th century, to house the Scaliger fleet. Guards had a complete view of this area from the castle’s parapet walk. In the castle’s corners, there are three merlon towers and the 47 m defensive tower. Its wooden stairs have been renovated and visitors can now climb to the top. Inside, there is a museum featuring information on the building and the castle’s past. One of the tourist services offered by the town of Sirmione is an audio guide in Italian and English for a town and castle visit. The audio guide and information on the town’s history and sights can be downloaded for free from the internet.

**Lonato Castle**

Lonato del Garda is located in the Brescia area, about 15 km south-east of Sirmione. A fortified castle – one of the most important in Lombardy – towers over the town. It was given an asymmetric layout to make it blend in with its surroundings. The first structural changes were carried out in the 10th century and it is easy to deduce the stronghold’s strategic importance from its location. The building consists of two parts, the upper part housing the castle, the lower the so-called headquarters. The gate and the drawbridge were reconstructed during renovation works in 1980, allowing access to the castle from the south. Turning right, visitors get to the headquarters, which once housed barracks, a room for other purposes and a fountain that was used as a water butt. The guards and artillery room is reached through an arched portal. From here, visitors can walk up to the upper castle along merlon walls. Inside the so-called Quartiere di Monizione, visitors reach the main tower, which was once a prison. Opposite is the house in which the lord of the castle lived. Today it is the seat of a conference hall and the Civic Ornithology Museum (Museo Civico Ornitologico).

Lonato’s Rocca can be reached on foot or by car and boasts a small carpark. The outdoor grounds can be visited daily, the residence and the museum on Saturday and Sunday at the following times: from 10 am to 12 pm and from 2:30 to 7 pm in the summer; the museum closes before sunset, however, in the winter. For further information, a visit to the town’s website is recommended.

**Padenghe Castle**

The itinerary proposed by GardaConcierge leads back to the lake shore and further north, up to Padenghe sul Garda, where a castle sits on a hill above the town. There are also remains of Roman buildings, on top of which a castle was built in the 9th and 10th century. Rectangular stonework, which also includes a 20 m watchtower, surrounds the entire building. During renovation work in the 1980s, the stonework was fortified and the meat was filled with soil. Before that, the castle experienced the rule of the Scaliger family, Visconti and the Republic of Venice. The renovation works restored the castle to the appearance it had in the 13th to 14th centuries, when the Della Scala family ruled. The castle can be reached through an arched portal with a drawbridge. Inside its walls, along two streets, stand a few houses; in front of the castle there is a rather large carpark. For further information, please refer to the website of Padenghe sul Garda.

**Moniga Castle**

The last castle of this tour is also located in the Valtenesi area, a little further north. It is a defensive fortification, similar to the one in Padenghe in that it has never been a residence, but it also included houses for people in need of protection. The fortification is located on a small hill. It is still well-preserved today, as it was not of great strategic interest and protected from turf wars due to its location. Like the previous buildings, the castle seems to date back to the 10th century. Then the castle lived through a phase of dilapidation and neglect – at least between the 14th and 15th centuries, from which the building material is. Along the rectangular course of the wall, semi-circular defensive towers stand in the corners and in the middle of three of the four sides. A rectangular tower stands on the fourth side of the stronghold. An arch below functions as an entrance to the fortification.

The castle is open to the public. There is a limited number of parking spaces in front of the castle entrance. We recommend a visit to the town’s website for further information on the castle in Moniga del Garda.
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Archaeological Sites

The editorial staff of GardaConcierge has prepared a new cultural guide which helps visitors explore the past of the Lake Garda area via its archaeological sites.

**Monte San Martino – Riva del Garda**

One of the most important archaeological sites in the region is located on the northern shore of Lake Garda: an old town was situated on Monte San Martino, at a height of about 800 metres. It had a favourable location due to its access to major transportation routes. Finds on site date the settlements in the area to the late Iron Age. They also prove there was religious life during this period. The settlement was still a cult site during Roman times; indeed the construction of a complex that probably served as a sanctuary dates back to the 1st century A.D. Statuettes of various deities found here indicate that the complex was used as a polytheistic holy place. The area was, however, used primarily for military purposes between the 5th and 6th century, at least in the southern part. At that time, a permanent settlement arose; judging from the finds of dwellings, this was a large town. The Chiesa San Martino church dates from a later period, namely the time between the 8th and 9th century, and has experienced various changes over time.

Tetto is the seat of the documentation centre of Monte San Martino. It houses finds from the excavation works, exhibited according to the various settlement periods. We recommend a visit to the centre’s website for further information and ticket reservation (www.archeosanmartino.it).

**Petroglyphs – Torri del Benaco**

Our exploration of Lake Garda’s prehistoric past takes us to some of the many places on the slopes of Monte Baldo that feature petroglyphs. The area concerned is extensive. Most of the petroglyphs are situated in the Torri del Benaco area that reaches from Crero to Brancolino and borders on Garda. In close proximity to Crero is the so-called Roccia Grande, the largest piece of rock covered with petroglyphs in the area. The area around Brancolino features petroglyphs that were discovered in the 1960s and mostly depict boats. Drawings of weapons were uncovered later. These were created much earlier, around the 1st century B.C. The petroglyphs were made by engraving or bush-hammering with hard stone such as serpentine or quartzite. The petroglyphs are more clearly visible in the morning light when wet.

To visit the petroglyphs in the Crero area, it is advisable to leave the car in Torri and follow the mule track leading to the Coi quarter. Brancolino is also best reached on foot. We recommend leaving one’s car in San Vigilio and walking along the Strada dei Catèi that was once the only connecting road between Torri and Garda.

Some of the most beautiful petroglyphs can be seen in the “Sala delle Incisioni” at the museum of the Scaliger castle in Torri del Benaco.
Lake Garda is characterised by various prehistoric pile-dwelling villages. These villages in Peschiera and at Lake Frassino have been added to the UNESCO world heritage list along with other places in the French, Swiss, Italian, Austrian, German and Slovenian Alps. The organic materials of the buildings have been preserved because of the surrounding water – in better condition than they would have been in the open air. The settlement extending from Belvedere to Peschiera del Garda is one of the oldest of its kind and, counting thirty thousand square metres, one of the largest.

Underwater research has revealed that the area was inhabited throughout the Bronze Age. The less extensive works at Lake Frassino brought to light finds that are well-preserved due to their origin in a peat pit.

Finds from the pile-dwelling villages on Lake Garda can also be seen in the palaeoanthropological collection at Verona’s natural history museum. We recommend a visit to the museum website for further information (museodistorianaturale.comune.verona.it).

Grotte Catullo – Sirmione

The “Grotte di Catullo” are located in Sirmione on the southern end of Lake Garda. The remains of this North Italian manor house are impressive. Despite the fact that the Roman poet Catullus had a property in the Sirmione area, it is by no means certain that this villa was his. Due to excavation works started between the two world wars and finished only recently, the underlying principle of the construction can now be seen. It is characterised by order and symmetry even when it comes to space distribution. The villa has a rectangular layout, covering an area of more than two hectares. For its construction, the ground had to be levelled on a wide area. The main floor has suffered damages, while the middle and ground floor are well-preserved. The villa was built during the Augustan age, more precisely, between the end of the 1st century B.C. and the start of the 1st century A.D.; it seems however to have been abandoned in the 4th century. After this era, the villa was uninhabited, and the building started to deteriorate.

The Grotte di Catullo can be visited from April to September, from Tuesdays to Sundays 9 am to 6 pm, and from October to March at reduced opening times on the same days from 9 am to 4 pm. The associated museum is close to the excavation site, at the Piazzale Orti Manara, and has the same opening times. Further information is available on the website of the excavation site (www.grottedicatullo.beniculturali.it).

Villa Romana – Desenzano del Garda

At the beginning of the 1920s, the remains of another villa from Roman times on Lake Garda came to light quite by accident. The villa is also situated in the province of Brescia, but further west, in the town of Desenzano del Garda. The construction of the villa can be traced back to three successive phases during the period from the end of the 1st century B.C. and the 1st half of the 4th century A.D. If the villa traditionally attributed to Catullus is impressive, the Villa Romana in Desenzano wins visitors over with its splendid multi-coloured mosaics that have been reconstructed over an area of more than 240 square meters. Due to the building’s close proximity to Lake Garda it is assumed that it once had direct access to Lake Garda with its moles and berths. It seems likely that the building was used for fishing.

As mentioned before, the mosaics give great artistic value to the site. Among the designs, grape gathering putti, chariots, wild animals, allegorical scens, and maenads and satyrs are worth mentioning. The name of the villa’s former owner is unknown, but the building’s opulence suggests that it was an illustrious and affluent person. The villa could therefore have belonged to the brother of the Roman usurper Magnentius, Flavius Magnus Decentius, whose name can be easily traced back to the town of Desenzano. The museum seat is in the villa’s entrance area. In the “antiquarium”, it houses the finds from excavations. Visiting hours are as follows: from March to October, Tuesdays to Sundays from 9:30 to 7 pm. From November to February, the museum closes at 5 pm on the same days. Further information is available on the town website (www.comune.desenzano.brescia.it).

Villa Romana – Toscolano Maderno

Another archaeological complex from Roman times is situated on the western shore of Lake Garda, in the town of Toscolano Maderno: it is a villa similar in structure to those of Sirmione and Desenzano. The existence of the Villa Romana was already known in the 15th and 16th centuries. It is thought to have belonged to the Nonii Arrii, one of the most important families in the Brescia area. Even though the excavation works on Lake Garda brought to light only a part of the complex, one can imagine the structure of the general planimmetrical complex. Construction started in the 1st century A.D. The main body of the first building ran parallel to the lake shore and boasted two front buildings on the north and south side as well as a loggia with lake view. The complex then experienced various changes and renovations up to the 5th century. During a visit today, one can explore the lateral front building on the villa’s south side. It consists of various rooms which feature external walls of more than one metre high with the remains of earlier decorations. The excavations have also brought to light the floor of a few rooms, decorated with mosaics. Identification of another part of the complex started recently. About 50 metres north of the so-called front building is a room that probably served as a triclinium, a Roman dining room, that had access to the loggia with a lake view. In the outdoor area, i.e. in the garden leading to the lake, the remains of an impressive rectangular fountain have been found.

For information on the opening hours for individual, free and guided tours subject to a cost, we recommend visiting the town website (www.comune.toscolanomaderno.bs.it).
Cultural Holiday

Historical Villas

They are the most splendid, sumptuous and magnificent the Lake Garda area has to offer – the historical villas and palazzi on the lake shore. The editorial staff of GardaConcierge has created a new itinerary that takes you to the most magnificent historical residences in the area.

City Casino - Arco

The first stop of our tour, that starts in the north as usual, is the city casino of Arco on the northern shore of Lake Garda. The building was erected at the end of the 19th century: its originary structure was changed during subsequent construction works. After various renovation works, the city casino can today be seen in the form it had at the beginning of the 20th century, when the splendid villa and a ballroom were added to the main building. What was once a meeting point for the European high society of the 19th century who came to the town’s spa, today is a venue for cultural and other events as well as a tavern in the heart of Arco. From the Viale delle Palme, the promenade in front of the veranda, visitors can access the villa. The garden houses a music pavilion, where concerts are held. For further information on Arco’s city casino we recommend a visit to the city casino website (www.caffecasinoarco.it).

Villa Guarienti – Punta San Vigilio

Our tour to the historical residences takes us south to one of the most beautiful view points on Lake Garda, Punta San Vigilio. This peninsula at the gulf of Lake Garda houses the Villa Guarienti, also known as Villa Brenzoni. The building, which dates back to the 16th century, seems to be the work of Veronese architect Michele Sanmicheli, who is also responsible for various other projects in the area. The villa complex, commissioned by the Venetian Agostino Brenzoni, is surrounded by a garden, in which cypresses, olive and lemon trees abound: trees which perfectly represent the vegetation on Lake Garda. An inn with a lake view is also part of the building, as are a small church, probably built before the villa, a building with a double loggia and a lake view as well as an adjacent small harbour. The Villa Guarienti houses a restaurant and a hotel and is open to visitors. The complex is within easy reach of the main road which runs along the eastern shore of Lake Garda, but also from Lake Garda itself, given that the small harbour is still operating today.

Villa Albertini and Villa Carlotti Canossa – Garda

Continuing south, in Garda, two historical residences of considerable artistic and architectural interest are a must-see: Villa Albertini and Villa Carlotti Canossa. The first building, Villa Albertini, dates back to the second half of the 16th century, when the Becelli family commissioned the project. The villa is now owned by the Albertini family, who gave the building its name. The residence is only a few steps from Lake Garda: its entrance and gardens are situated at the Gardesana road (SR249) on the eastern shore of Lake Garda. Renovation works have been carried out of late to repair the damage caused by recent earthquakes. A large park on the hill, dominating Lake Garda, is also part of the estate. A bit further along the Gardesana road in the direction of San Vigilio, is the Villa Carlotti Canossa. The 16th-century building was renovated and enlarged by Veronese architect Giacomo Franco in the 19th century. The residence has a great location close to Lake Garda and is surrounded by green due to its garden and adjacent park. Both residences are privately owned and not open to the public.
Our tour on Lake Garda takes us to the heart of Bardolino. Villa Guerrieri Rizzardi is located in the middle of the old town on the site formerly occupied by patrician houses. Even though the site has seen the construction of a new building, the garden with a lake view has kept its 16th-century structure. This was despite a replanning by Giuseppe Jappelli shortly before the middle of the 19th century. Visitors can explore its wonders: cedars, bay trees and magnolias, betel nut palms and ginkgos, not to mention vines and orchards. The Villa Guerrieri Rizzardi is part of the agricultural business Guerrieri Rizzardi which has vineyards covering an area of 40 hectares between Bardolino and Cavaion and produces the Bardolino and Chiaretto wines. We recommend you visit the website of the agricultural business (www.guerrieririzzardi.it) before your visit. At the date of publication, the villa was not open to the public due to renovation works.

**Palazzo Todeschini and Villa Brunati – Desenzano del Garda**

We go to the western shore on Lake Garda, to Desenzano del Garda, where another two buildings of our route are located: Palazzo Todeschini and Villa Brunati.

Palazzo Todeschini, seat of Desenzano’s city hall up to the 1970s, overlooks a small picturesque harbour on Lake Garda. The 16th-century building was built according to a design by architect Giulio Todeschini. The building boasts fifteen stone arcades on lakeside. At the end, there is the so-called “stone of the unemployed” (Pietra dei Disoccupati), the place where sentences on insolvency were pronounced in the 16th century. Today, Palazzo Todeschini is the venue for conferences, events and visiting exhibitions. The building is easy to reach and has a private carpark.

The impressive Villa Brunati is also located in Desenzano. It was commissioned by monsignor Giacomo Roveglio at the end of the 16th century, replacing a previous medieval building. In the first half of the 18th century, the building underwent changes and expansion, before the Brunati family entrusted architect Antonio Tagliatelli with the renovation works. The frescos in the villa’s halls are due to him. Today, the villa is owned by the city of Desenzano and, after the latest renovation, acts as the seat of the municipal Angelo Anelli library. The Sala della Musa serves as a venue for conferences and meetings. There is a carpark in front of the villa. Further information regarding accessibility and the opening hours of both buildings can be found on the Palazzo Todeschini and the Villa Brunati websites (comune.desenzano.brescia.it).

**Villa Barbieri – Padenghe sul Garda**

On our way along the western shore of Lake Garda, we reach Padenghe sul Garda further north, a borough of Brescia, which houses one of the residences on our tour. Not far from the 17th-century Chiesa di Santa Maria church is the Villa Barbieri, built about a century later. This polyangular building has three floors: apart from the ground floor, it also boasts an intermediate storey and an upper floor. The stone facade is beautiful to look at not only because of its colours, but also because of its round arch entrance. Since the villa is a public building, visits are possible at the times listed on the town website (www.comune.padenghesulgarda.bs.it).

**Villa on the Isola del Garda – San Felice del Benaco**

The itinerary suggested by GardaConcierge takes us to perhaps the most spectacular residences on Lake Garda. It has a unique location, completely surrounded by the lake: close to San Felice del Benaco, there is the beautiful Isola del Garda, which houses a splendid villa that is now owned by the Cavazza family. The island is no more than 200 metres from Capo San Ferro. Due to its location, the island has been inhabited since Roman times; however, the construction of this grand villa in ne-gothic and Venetian style dates back to the 19th century. From church centre to the residence of the earls of Lechi, the building has had various names and functions. It is however due to architect Luigi Rovelli, hired by duke Gaetano de Ferrari, that the building enjoys its current splendour. The design of the Genoese architect also included an Italian garden in the area surrounding the residence.

The island is inhabited by the heirs of the Cavazza family today, but it can still be visited during a guided tour that includes transfer from a few towns on the western and eastern shores of Lake Garda. The guided tours include a visit to the villa’s gardens and halls. The residence on Isola del Garda offers a cultural programme: as for art, watercolours by Pierangelo Capretti are exhibited during the guided tour (they immortalize the most splendid views of the park and the villa); as far as music is concerned, there is a packed calendar of events with evening concerts from May to September.

For further information on opening hours, admission prices and events, we recommend a visit to the villa’s website (www.isoladelgarda.com).

**Il Vittoriale degli Italiani and Villa Alba – Gardone Riviera**

Our tour of the historical residences of Lake Garda continues in Gardone Riviera, north of the Gulf of Salò, where visitors will find two more villas: the Vittoriale degli Italiani and Villa Alba.

The Vittoriale was built between the two world wars on the initiative of the poet Gabriele D’Annunzio and with the participation of architect Giancarlo Maroni. The complex is located on a hill dominating the lake. The countryside is characterised by buildings, gardens and a beautiful amphitheatre opening onto Lake Garda, which forms an impressive backdrop to every artistic and music show. The area concerned of the monumental complex takes up about nine hectares and can be reached via the double arch entrance.
Palazzo Bettoni – Bogliaco

Along the lake shore, some ten kilometres from Gardone Riviera, our last tour stop is Bogliaco, a district of Gargnano. This town boasts one of the most beautiful villas on Lake Garda, Palazzo Bettoni. The project by architect Adriano Cristofori, which was commissioned by Giandomenico Bettoni, dates back to the 18th century and has an ordered, but still impressive structure. The main building of the Palazzo boasts a balustrade which is decorated with the mythological figures of Veronese Giovanni Battista Locatelli. Inside, the main hall houses various baroque works. The walls are decorated with frescoes by Beniamino and Fabrizio Galliari. The 18th-century Palazzo distinguishes itself with the orderly and symmetrical forms of the Italian-style garden and the park with its lemon houses on the side not facing the lake. Amerigo Vincenzo Pierallini designed the garden, with its staircases that converge in one place, on which a neo-classical temple dedicated to Apollo was once planned.

Today, Palazzo Bettoni is the seat of an agricultural business which produces wine and spirits. Guided tours of the estates are organised by appointment.

Palazzo Feltrinelli – Gargnano

Our tour takes us to the northern shore of Lake Garda, more specifically to Piazza Vittorio Veneto in Gargnano, where Palazzo Feltrinelli is located. It was built by order of the Feltrinelli family, which originally was from Gargnano and moved to Milan only later. The residence was designed by the architect Solimi and built in the last years of the 19th century. The building is rectangular and extends over three floors, with the entrance being graced by a colonnade with three arcades. The change of ownership led to the building being used as a monastery and later by the fascists: like many other residences in the area, Palazzo Feltrinelli was confiscated during the Republic of Salò and used as part of the fascist operations centre. Today, the building is the seat of the University of Milan, which offers Italian language courses during the summer months and hosts meetings and conferences. The university website (www.unimi.it) gives detailed information on the building.

Gargnano also houses a country estate commissioned by the Feltrinelli family. The villa, known as Villa Feltrinelli, is surrounded by a lovely garden. The stylish neo-gothic building has been renovated recently and now houses a splendid luxury hotel.

Villa Boghi – Limone

Our tour to the historical residences on Lake Garda closes with a stop in the northernmost Lombard town on Lake Garda, Limone. Here, the Villa Boghi is located. Its construction started in the 20th century following a design by Giovanni Bonaventura Gerardi. Like the Palazzo Feltrinelli in Gargnano, the villa is a multi-storey, rectangular building, that can be accessed via an archway with a double balcony. The villa, seat of the town of Limone, is surrounded by a garden; a lemon house is nearby. The town holds events and exhibitions in the park, which is open to public. For further information we recommend a visit to the town website (www.comune.limonesulgarda.bs.it).
Cultural Holiday

Annual Events

The editorial staff of GardaConcierge has prepared a new guide, titled “Annual Events”, which lists the year’s cultural and arts events in the Lake Garda area. Theatre festivals, concerts, re-enactments, readings and arts markets are certain to stimulate visitors’ and tourists’ curiosity and interest!

Words at the Waterside – Bardolino

“Words at the Waterside” (Parole sull’Acqua) kicks off the annual cultural events in the Lake Garda area. The set of encounters, held in Piazza del Porto in Bardolino in June and lasting several days, provides an opportunity for exchange between authors and readers. Not only does it give a face to the authors of essays and novels, but it also offers readers the chance to learn interesting facts, ask questions and dispel any doubts concerning the novels’ plots.

Vittoriale Festival – Gardone Riviera

We continue our review of cultural events with the Tener-A-Mente festival at the Vittoriale in Gardone Riviera. Various summer evenings are on the programme, featuring artists of international standing. Performances range from theatre to music and from jazz to dance. The venue is the amphitheatre of the Vittoriale, a complex created by the writer Gabriele D’Annunzio. The amphitheatre’s location on a hill overlooking Lake Garda offers a splendid view of the scenery during the performances.

Music Summer on Lake Garda – Salò

The international violin festival of Salò is held under the title “Music Summer on Lake Garda” (Estate Musicale del Garda). The festival, one of the oldest in Italy, attracts musicians from all over the world. From classical music to rock and jazz, all genres are represented, with the string instrument par excellence playing the starring role.

“1, 2, Tié” Arts Event – Bardolino

The “1, 2, Tié” arts event is held in Bardolino’s Borgo Garibaldi, on the eastern shore of Lake Garda, at the end of August. The event, organised by the “Bardolino Top” foundation, is dedicated to the fine arts. It brings together painters, sculptors, photographers and ceramists, offering them an exhibition space in town to present their works.
Medieval Pageant – Malcesine

While “1, 2, Tiè” takes place in Bardolino – from the end of August to the beginning of September – the “Età di Mezzo” medieval pageant is held in Malcesine on the northern shore of Lake Garda. On the weekend, the old town and the castle take a leap back in time; soldiers, artisans, standard-bearers, archers and court ladies transport visitors to the Middle Ages. The historical re-enactment offers entertainment, performances and dishes for every age group. The event ends with musical fireworks.

Fairy Tale Night – Riva del Garda

The event is held in Riva del Garda on the northern shore of Lake Garda at the end of the summer. The fairy tale night (Notte di Fiaba), which has a long tradition, is aimed at an audience of every age. The programme not only comprises readings and performances, but also workshops, concerts and games. The only requirement is to let your imagination roam free! The fairy tale night ends with fireworks that create a magical and simply marvellous atmosphere.

“La Gardesana” Cultural Event – Desenzano del Garda

The event “La Gardesana – Words, Images and Encounters” is held on the southern shore of Lake Garda, more precisely in Desenzano, in the period from the end of August to the beginning of September. The event brings together people engaged in the cultural sphere and from the world of politics in the heart of the town, the Piazza Malvezzi, to discuss this year’s topic. The concept of beauty was the the topic of debate in 2013, when the event was first held, and the manifestation of the seven deadly sins in contemporary Italy the year after.

Of Music and Poetry… in the Illuminated Castle – Malcesine

The series of events titled “Of Music and Poetry . . . in the Illuminated Castle” (Di Musica e Poesia . . . Luci al Castello) is held at the Scaliger castle in Malcesine, on the northern shore of Lake Garda, on various evenings in September. Entrance is free. The poetry readings are accompanied by background music, and candles and torches lighten the castle, creating a unique atmosphere.

“La Gardesana” Vintage Cycle Event – Malcesine

The “La Gardesana” event dedicated to vintage bicycles is also held in Malcesine every year, but in October. During the one-day event, vintage bicycles, accessories and associated objects are on display and can be swapped. A historical procession is also on the programme. Here, not only the means of transport, but also the cyclists’ clothes are from a different era.

St. Martin’s Day – Peschiera del Garda

Saint Martin, the patron saint of Peschiera, is celebrated here, on the southern shore of Lake Garda, in November. Traditionally, St. Martin’s Day falls on 11 November, but festivities in Peschiera last several days, comprising also the weekend closest to the date. The festival encompasses exhibitions and conferences, a Venetian rowing competition (Voga Veneta, with the rower standing on the flat-bottomed boat) in the central Canale di Mezzo and a concert by the town orchestra. Throughout the festivities, foods stalls offer specialities of the region. The festival ends with the “Incendio dei Voltoni” musical fireworks (Inflammation of the Voltoni bridge) at the Canale di Mezzo.

The Arts Bridge – Peschiera del Garda

The Arts Bridge event (Il Ponte dell’Arte) is also held in Peschiera, but every third weekend in the month. It takes place in one of the most beautiful places of the town, the pedestrian bridge at the Porte Brescia. Here, works of painters and sculptors are on display for sale every third weekend in the month.

For more detailed information on the dates of the individual events, we recommend a visit to the www.gardaconcierge.com web portal.

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