



LAKE GARDA
exploring the Brescian shores



itinerary of approximately 18 km if you take the ferry or approximately 70 km if you go with the ferry and return by road

Place to visit:

⇒ GARDONE RIVIERA (on the ferry)

The crossing only takes half an hour; then you get into your car and head south. First stop at [Gardone Riviera](#), known very adaptly as the "garden city", divided into Gardone di Sotto and Gardone di Sopra. An extraordinary array of cedars, magnolias and palm trees as well as others all thrive thanks to its particular climate. You can take a relaxing stroll through the historical centre and along the lakeside, admiring the villas and hotels surrounded by vast parks that still preserve the liberty style of the late 19th century.

We have to mention [Villa Alba](#), with its majestic neo-classical aspect, designed to imitate the Acropolis monuments in Athens. Dating from the early 20th century, the villa now belongs to the Town Council. Its splendid façade is embellished with columns, loggias and a monumental flight of steps. The surrounding park, open to the public, descends right down to the lake front. The villa is a congress centre and not open to the public.

The splendid [Villa Fiordaliso](#), loaded with history, must be mentioned because it was here, in 1943, that Mussolini's companion Claretta Petacci stayed in the "red room" on the second floor. This residence was the backdrop for the two lovers' meetings: a magnificent example of Renaissance architecture, restructured and frescoed in the 1930s. Situated on the lakeside and surrounded by centuries-old trees, it is now a luxury hotel with only seven exclusive suites.

Still on the lakeside you will find Chiesa di S. Nicolò, finished in 1740, which conserves precious paintings and canvases by Veronese, Palma il Giovane, and Andrea Celesti. The apse, facing the lake, is surrounded by an ample balcony from which, on a clear day, you can see as far as Sirmione.

Gardone has always been a favourite spot for tourists visiting Lake Garda, including some very important persons. Without doubt the most famous was Gabriele D'Annunzio, the famous extravagant Italian poet who fell so much in love with the locality that he moved to the [Vittoriale](#), at Gardone di Sopra.

This magnificent residence, originally belonging to the German art critic Henry Tolde, was bought in 1921 by Gabriele D'Annunzio who named it the "*Prioria*", transforming it into a spell-binding monumental



complex to stupefy visitors.

This eccentric personage wanted to construct a totally surreal environment, with obscure, unsettling rooms, objects and furnishings. In other words, a place where no-one else would dare to live. The Vittoriale is truly worth a visit, viewing the rooms overcrowded with every sort of object, furnished with drapes, curtains and carpets covering every possible space, where you can admire historic relics, precious objects and rarities coming from every part of the world.

"*Stanza della Cheli*" is the dining room where D'Annunzio received his guests: the room, in coloured lacquered wood, is full of tables loaded with precious items and oriental idols. "*Stanza della Leda*", on the other hand, is the bedroom where the poet received his numerous lovers. Various historical relics lie amongst the numerous phallic statuettes scattered around the room. "*Veranda dell'Apollino*" is the room where the poet preferred to retreat when dedicated to literature; walls are lined with ancient texts and classical statues.

The most important room in the complex is, however, the study which D'Annunzio called his workshop ("*l'Officina*"): if there is a room that seems vaguely normal, this is it. Big and luminous, furnished with two desks and completed with shelves and cupboard overflowing with vocabularies and volumes. The study is dominated by the bust of Eleonora Duse, one of his greatest loves. Continue your visit outside where marvels and surprises are not lacking! The "*Schifamondo*", a house which D'Annunzio never inhabited, the *Nave "Puglia"*, embedded in the hillside, one of the most surprising



relics in the grounds, the *Roman theatre* with seating for 1500 spectators during the summer theatre season, the *aeroplane* with which D'Annunzio used to fly over Vienna in 1918, launching propaganda in favour of Italy, and then the *Mausoleum*, high above, where the poet's body was buried in 1963.

(open: from April to September, h. 8.30-20.00 - Prioria, h. 9.30-19.00; from October to March, h. 9.00-17.00 - Prioria, h. 9.00-13.00/14.00-17.00; for information, call 0365 296511 - photos kindly lent by the Vittoriale)

From the Vittoriale car park, a short walk takes you to the [Giardino Botanico Hruska](#), created by Arturo Hruska, a dentist of Czechoslovakian origin who lived in Bressanone (BZ).

During a first visit to Gardone in 1905, he fell in love with Lake Garda and decided to move to Gardone. This botany enthusiast bought a piece of land on

Monte Lavino, sloping towards the lake, where he dedicated an area of roughly 10,000 square metres to realising his dream of a spectacular garden.

Around his house, between 1910 and 1971, he created a splendid park with more



than 500 plant species coming from all the corners of the earth, from the Alps to the Himalayas, from Mato Grosso to New Zealand, from Japan to Australia, from Canada to Africa.

Strolling around these splendid gardens, you will discover the many streams that Hruska constructed to solve the problem of irrigation. They flow over the rocks to form waterfalls and ponds, a natural habitat where water lilies, papyruses and lilies grow in abundance. The tinkling of the waters accompanies

you through the groves and meadows rich with colourful vegetation including fuchsias,

primroses, begonias, iris, magnolias and deep green ferns.

One of the greatest attractions in the garden is the section dedicated to the mountain environment constructed to imitate a corner of the Dolomites: a thirteen-metre wall hides rocks, clefts and gullies where three waterfalls gush over the stones. In only a few metres the scenario changes completely to a tropical garden with succulent plants of all kinds, or the Japanese garden occupied by a thicket of bamboo.



A look towards the lake reminds us where we are in case we had forgotten! (*open: from March to October, every day, h. 9.00-19.00; for information, call: APT at Gardone Riviera tel. 0365 20347, or 0336410877 - we thank Giardino Botanico Hruska for use of the photos*).

Ristorante VILLA FIORDALISO

Corso Zanardelli, 150 - GARDONE RIVIERA / tel. 0365 20158

(average price, excluding wine: € 52.00; closed Mondays and Tuesdays)

If you choose to dine in this exclusive restaurant, you will enjoy the elegant atmosphere where history left an indelible mark: it was here that Claretta Petacci, Mussolini's lover, stayed during the brief duration of the Republic of Salò.

Apart from the historical note, this restaurant is renowned for its excellent cuisine and is becoming a protagonist on the gastronomic scene of Lake Garda. The chef, Riccardo Camanini, creates authentic culinary works of art, using a wide range of refined and costly ingredients or the most simple, exalting every single dish. The restaurant specialises in freshwater and sea fish but serves exquisite first courses and meat dishes as well as some original delicacies such as grilled porcini mushrooms with celery and turnips.

Trattoria BELVEDERE DA MARIETTA

Via Montecucco, 62 - GARDONE RIVIERA / tel. 0365 20960

(average price, excluding wines: € 36.00; closed on Thursdays, open every day throughout summer)

The fame of this family business is based on the simplicity and genuineness of the tasty dishes on the menu, consisting of the season's best and the delicacy of local fare. The pasta is hand made on the premises and sauces are made with lake fish, fresh seasonal vegetables or duck. Second courses range from meat to fish, specially grilled, but there are some interesting alternatives such as the traditional pike in Gardesana sauce or stockfish, Brescia style.

Is that all? Not by any means! We cannot ignore one of the restaurant's essential attractions: the superb panorama! From the terrace you can admire a view of almost all the lake with the Sirmione peninsula in the forefront.

The trattoria is not easy to reach but it is certainly worth the effort!



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