

Stresa Town Trail

Starting point: outside Stresa Tourist Office

1. Piazza Marconi

We start our town trail outside the Tourist Office and ferry station building. Although the building only dates back to 1859, there were ferry services on Lake Maggiore long before. On 15th February 1826 the steamship "Verbano" sailed her maiden voyage on the route from Arona to Magadino (near Locarno). The journey, which can be done these days in as little as 2¼ hours used to take a whole day. The square itself was enlarged to its present size in 1890 and became home to the station for the Mottarone Railway. The electric rack and pinion railway, which operated from 1911 – 1963, carried passengers from where you are standing now, to Stresa railway station, Vedasco and finally to the top of Mottarone. In its heyday the train carried 108,000 passengers in just one year!

Piazza Marconi used to be home to the local weekly market which was first held in the 14th century. The weekly markets stopped in 1497 when the population had dwindled due to epidemics and floods. In 1854 the local council decided it was time for market to restart. And since then there has been a local market in Stresa every Friday morning. It is now held in Piazza Capucci.

Now turn left out of the square and cross over the road.

2. Stresa Casino

The large building now used as offices for the Lake District Tourist Board used to be home to Stresa Casino. The original Stresa Casino (Kursaal) was opened in 1906 near the current cable car station at the Lido. It was part of a grand plan to create a casino and thermal spa centre. During the 1920's, however the Lido site was abandoned and the casino was moved to this location. Remains of the original Kursaal can be seen near the Lido in the form of grand stone pillars which marked its entrance. Casinos are the only legal form of gambling in Italy and there are only 5 casino licences in the country. They are currently held by casinos in San Remo, Venice (2 casinos), Saint Vincent in the Aosta Valley and Campione d'Italia which is an Italian city within Switzerland.

Turn right into Via Rosmini and stop by the little church

3. Church of Saints Michele Arcangelo and Francesco d'Assisi

Work on the church began in 1630 and it was inaugurated in 1653 with its altar dedicated to the Virgin. It was parish church until the current parish church was built in 1790. It was then reduced to a storage area until it was blessed and re-opened for worship in 1874. It was decorated in 1922 by Dean Giuseppe Cassani.

Turn right into Via Garibaldi until you reach the little square and the Municipio building

4. Municipio building

This building, which dates back to the 19th century, is the town hall and is where the Mayor of Stresa and the local council have their offices. This is also where Italians can go to renew their ID cards, prolong their driving licence (this must be done every 5 years) and collect general paperwork and forms. Civil wedding ceremonies are also carried out at the Municipio.

Walk up the little side street to the left of the Municipio and turn right into the main square, Piazza Cadorna. Carry on through the square and turn left into Via Roma

As you walk up Via Roma there is a river a few metres beneath your feet which runs all the way down to the lake. The river is called the Crée and was covered over in 1910 to make way for the Mottarone Railway which ran up Via Roma from the ferry station to Stresa railway station on its way to Mottarone. Old photographs show local women coming down to the river to do their laundry! The river used to split Stresa in two. On one side of the river the town was ruled by the Visconti family and on the other side the Borromeo family ruled. Even though Stresa has long been a united town, there is still an annual friendly football match between the Visconti team and the Borromeo team.

Turn right into Via de Amicis

5. Palazzina Liberty

Palazzina Liberty was once a primary school. It is now owned by the council and is used for various functions and exhibitions.

6. Stresa Alpine Association

This is the Stresa branch of the ANA (National Alpine Troops Association). The Association was founded in 1919 after the end of the First World War. It has grown ever since and now has 380,000 members in Italy and across the world. Part of the organisation includes the Civil Protection group who intervene in many national and international emergencies.

Turn left into Via Bonghi and right into Via de Martini – you will now be outside the entrance to the "Palazzo dei Congressi"

7. Palazzo dei Congressi

The foundation stone to the Palazzo dei Congressi was laid in 1955 under the plans of architect Alziro Bergonzo and with the blessing of the local priest. Building was completed in just one year and the Palazzo was inaugurated in 1956. Over the years it has been renovated to keep up with the technological advances in conference organisation. As well as conferences, the Palazzo hosts many concerts and theatrical productions including the internationally renowned Stresa Musical Weeks.

Now turn right into Via P Canonica and walk down the side of the Regina Palace hotel to the lakefront. To your left is the Villa Ducale.

8. Villa Ducale

The Villa Ducale was built in 1770 by Giacomo Filippo Bolongaro when he returned to Stresa after having made his fortune in tobacco. At that time the gardens reached as far as the shore. When he died in 1780 the property was passed on to his granddaughter who was a close friend of the Abbott Antonio Rosmini. She convinced him to make the villa his official residence and when she died the villa was inherited by the Rosmini and became a prestigious cultural centre. Over the years the villa changed ownership many times and became known as the Villa Ducale when it was in the hands of the Duchess of Genova (part of the Italian Royal Family). After the Rosmini reacquired the villa in 1942 it was restored and was inaugurated as the International Centre for Rosminian Studies in 1966. The villa houses a vast library containing over 100,000 volumes.

The Duchess of Genova's daughter, Margherita (who later became the first Italian queen) also used to stay at the Villa and in her honour a local baker decided to make her a special biscuit. The young princess liked the biscuits so much that they were named "Margheritine" and the baker's son went on to produce the biscuits, not only for the royal household but for everyone. Today you will find the wonderful biscuits on sale in the local bakeries and bars.

Turn back on yourself and walk along the lakefront passing the grand hotels on your way.

On your way along the lakefront you will pass 2 of Stresa's original hotels. The Regina Palace is immediately on you left and was built in 1908 in liberty style and was host to the first ever Miss Italy beauty pageant in 1946 and continued to be host for the next 2 years. Stresa's hotels have accommodated many famous people over the years including Kings and Queens from around the world, George Bernard Shaw, Toscanini, Clark Gable, Andrew Carnegie and Charlie Chaplin.

9. Grand Hotel des Îles Borromées

The Grand Hotel des Îles Borromées was built between 1861 - 1863 by the Omarini brothers. Their father was a fisherman and the family already ran a hotel on Isola Bella. The Hotel's most famous guest was Ernest Hemmingway. He first stayed at the hotel in September 1918 at the age of 19 during his convalescence after the First World War. The second time he stayed at the hotel was in October 1948. He stayed in room 105 which is now the Hemmingway Suite and is the most requested room at the hotel. Stresa and Lake Maggiore are mentioned in his book "Farewell to Arms"

Carry on past the Grand Hotel Bristol and cross over to the lakeside promenade. Turn right down Via G. Borromeo. You will pass 2 ruined villas on your way to the cable car station.

10. Villa "La Palazzola"

Villa La Palazzola dates back to the 19th century and was once owned by S. Belloni who was a pioneer of electricity production. It has since

Stresa

Town Trail

A self-guided walk introducing you to Stresa's history.

been used as a bar/outside disco and is now belongs to the local council who have plans to renovate the villa and use it to house exhibitions.

11. Villa Castelli

Villa Castelli was built in 1925 and used to house a pioneering centre for wellness and entertainment. The spa water used to be transported from the nearby Anzasca Valley. Transporting the water cost so much money and was so difficult to transport that the business failed. The villa has a superb position on the lakefront and was requisitioned by the Wehrmacht during World War II. It has also been used as the set for many films.

12. Mottarone Cable Car

The cable car was inaugurated in July 1970, 7 years after the Mottarone Railway suspended its services. The cable car departs every 20 minutes and each car can carry 40 passengers. There is an intermediate stop at Alpino where passengers can admire the Alpine Gardens before continuing to the top stage at Mottarone (1491m). From the summit there is an uninterrupted 360° view across Lake Maggiore, Lake Orta and the Alps. In the winter there is a small ski area. There also used to be a bob sleigh run, an ice-skating rink and one of the first ski jumps in Italy, built in 1935. The first ski slalom ever was also held at Mottarone.

Retrace your steps back to the lakefront and return to the centre of Stresa along the lakeside promenade.

13. The Lakeside Promenade

Work started on the construction of the promenade in 1922 and was finished in 1930 when the gardens and lighting were added. It was built in several stages as its construction meant taking over space that was once used as gardens by the hotels. Along the lakefront you will see many monuments. The first you will come across is Stresa's memorial to the people who lost their lives in the September 11th disaster. You will then reach 2 war memorials. The first one depicts a mule and an alpine soldier and is dedicated to the Alpine Troops. The second one featuring

2 soldiers is to remember victims of the First and Second World Wars. A liberation day parade (very like the remembrance day parades held in the UK) is held every year on the 25th April.

When you reach the end of the end of the promenade cross over the road and stop by the church.

14. Stresa Parish Church (Saints Ambrogio & Theodulo)

Stresa Parish Church was built in 1790 and was designed by Abbot Giuseppe Zanoia from Omegna (Lake Orta). It is in the shape of a Greek cross with a neo-classic façade, adorned with 2 ornate angels. Inside you will find 3 altars. The main altar is in the centre and is decorated with 7th century paintings dedicated to Saint Ambrogio. The altar to the left hand side houses a painting by Morazzone representing the Crucifixion and the 3 saints, Carlo, Francesco and Antonio. On the third altar, to the right hand side, you will find the reliquary of Saint Vitiliano which was moved to Stresa on the orders of Pope Gregorio XVI.

The 7th of December is Stresa's St. Ambrogio festival - the patron saint day.

And this is where we end Stresa's town trail. We hope you have enjoyed your walk through some of Stresa's history and continue to enjoy your stay here.