



# In the lap OF LUXURY

Overlooking Lake Como, the family-run Grand Hotel Tremezzo delivers upscale glamour with authentic Italian charm

By NIGEL TISDALL / Photographer DANIEL BURDETT

Europe might be facing a fair amount of uncertainty these days, but the lakes and mountains of Lombardy never change. An hour's drive north of Milan, these placid waters and monumental mountains have been soothing troubled brows since Roman times. And Lake Como, 30 miles long and shaped like an upside-down Y, remains a favourite for writers, aristocrats and lovers of the Italian *modus vivendi*.

It was here, in 1910, that a worldly gentleman from Bellagio, Enea Gandola, capitalised on the enduring appeal of this peak-ringed paradise by opening a pioneering waterfront hotel in Tremezzo, on the sunny western side of the lake.

The Grand Hotel Tremezzo lived up to its name, offering romantic views over the lake

**THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT**  
The Piscina dei Fiori (Flowers Pool): a relaxation lounge in the T Spa; The Sala Musica lounge next to the T Bar; **OPPOSITE PAGE** Grand Hotel Tremezzo and the floating pool resting on Lake Como

along with enchanting gardens, a skating rink and – a novel luxury for the time – private bathrooms. Just over a century later, this eminent Art Nouveau residence has 90 exquisitely furnished rooms and suites, and the opulence and glamour lives on – largely because it has remained in private hands. While numerous *grandes-dames* hotels have been gobbled up by the big brands, here, the present owners – the De Santis family – have been at the helm for more than 40 years. And their personal touch is assured and impeccable, from the zesty orange awnings adorning the hotel façade to its famous signature dish of saffron risotto with gold leaf that was created by Gualtiero Marchesi, the first non-French chef with a three-Michelin-starred restaurant.

In a world saturated with luxury properties, Grand Hotel Tremezzo still feels truly grand and original. There are no fewer than five plush restaurants and bars. The T Spa is replete with ESPA products and offers views out to the water. And there are five acres of private gardens, as well as three swimming pools – including one that appears to miraculously float on the lake, like a huge tray offering bathers to the gods.

Prior to Signor Gandola's enterprise, Como's high-society visitors stayed in villas, often spending up to two months socialising and gadding about the uplifting scenery. Today, the hotel has exclusive access to the nearby 18th-century Villa Sola Cabiati, once the summer residence of the distinguished Serbelloni family (and the location for our Dolce & Gabbana fashion shoot). The quintessence of neoclassical elegance, this six-bedroom stately home can be rented in its entirety or hired for special occasions, including private dinners, lavish parties and family treasure hunts in the parkland. Hotel guests can also arrange a private tour of its antiques-filled rooms, which include frescoes by the Tiepolo School and a bed where Napoléon Bonaparte and his wife Josephine slept.

Most guests come to Como to relax as much as to explore, with spring or autumn a smart time to visit, when there are attractive rates and fewer day-trippers. The classic thing to do in Lake Como, of course, is to get out on the water to savour the breezes and admire the towering mountains and a shoreline graced with dream villas and pretty



*“The hotel has exclusive access to the 18th-century Villa Sola Cabiati”*

terracotta-hued towns. Some hop aboard the leisurely ferries known as *battelli*; others hire a motor boat. But the most glorious option is to book the Grand Hotel Tremezzo's vintage motor launch, Ruy. A sleek and glossy wooden rocket built in 1961 for a well-to-do Venetian family, it is perfect for cruising the lake in style or popping across to Bellagio for a wander through the steep cobbled streets lined with shops selling silk scarves and leather bags.

Visiting the imposing historic residences that border Lake Como is another favourite pastime. Handily set next door to the hotel, Villa Carlotta offers Canova statues and fabulous gardens, while Villa del Balbianello in Tremezzina was built in the late 18th century by a cardinal who clearly appreciated a splendid view. Also a popular stop is the lake's sole island, Comacina, where a celebrated *locanda* has been serving the same set menu for lunch and dinner since 1947.

Its entrance is plastered with photos of its many famous diners, from a young Brad Pitt to George Clooney, whose purchase of a villa beside Lake Como 15 years ago is said to have boosted tourism here by 20 per cent.

Another Hollywood celebrity who visited the area was Greta Garbo, who has a suite and a cocktail named in her honour at the hotel in recognition of her 1932 classic film *Grand Hotel*. Yes, that's the one where the Swedish actress famously pleads, “I want to be alone,” and also namechecks Tremezzo as a place where “the sun will shine” and “we'll be happy and lazy” – an equally apt description for this most illustrious of hotels. ■

**Grand Hotel Tremezzo, which reopens for 2018 on 9th March, offers double rooms from €517 including breakfast, with Villa Sola Cabiati available from €6,600 per night (minimum stay of three nights); [grandhoteltremezzo.com](http://grandhoteltremezzo.com). Elegant Resorts offers seven nights in a Lake View Prestige Room from £1,715 per person including flights, transfers and breakfast; [elegantresorts.co.uk](http://elegantresorts.co.uk)**

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