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VISIT SONDRIO

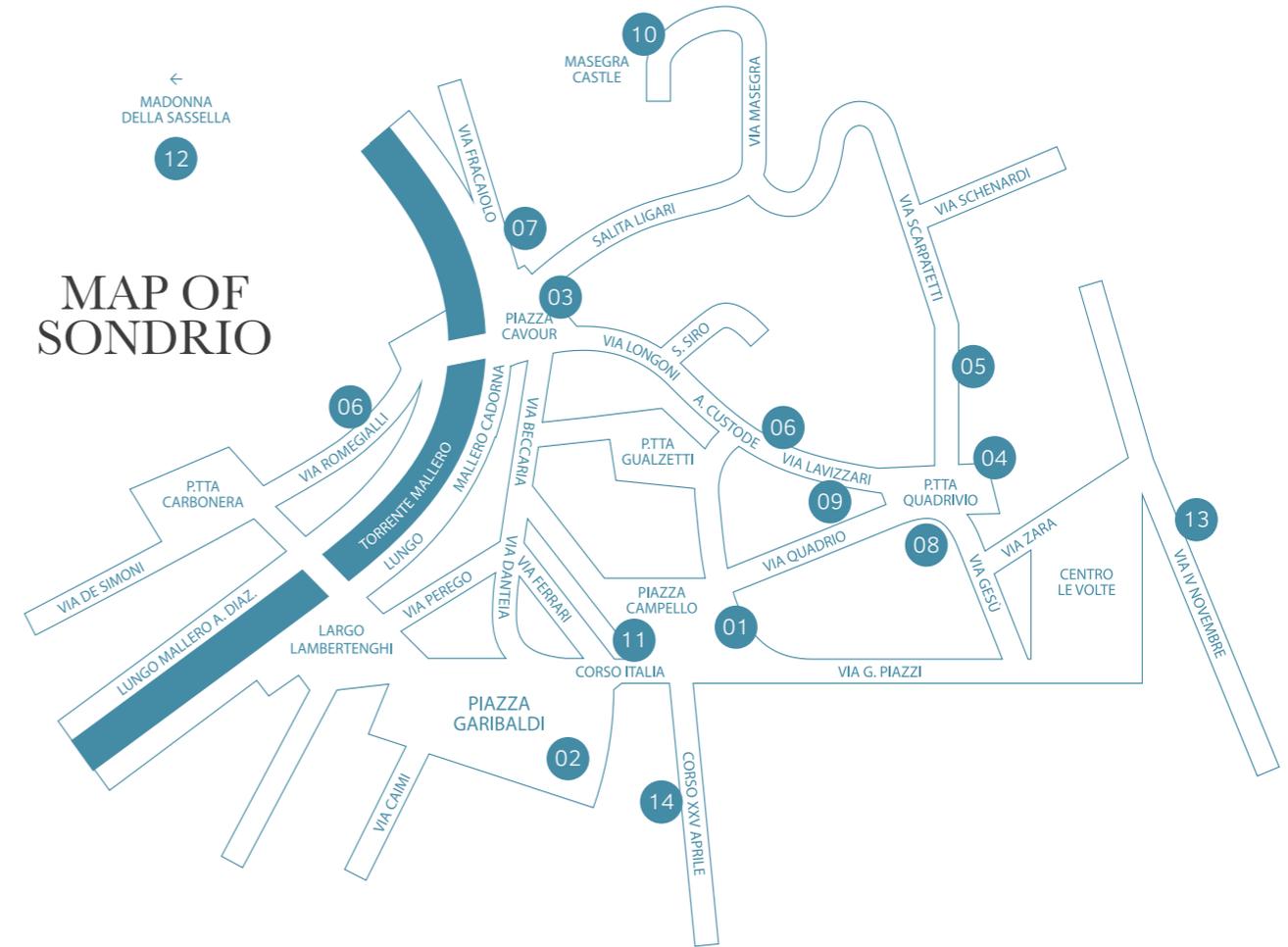


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Città di Sondrio

MAP OF SONDRIO



Landmarks / Points of interest:

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PIAZZA CAMPELLO / 01

Piazza Campello was the center of religious functions (the Collegiata and the other church buildings have unfortunately been destroyed) and the town's political life (the municipal building was once the seat of the Governor of the Grisons).

The piazza was named for the walled cemetery located at the side of the Collegiata, which served as the city's main burial site until Napoleonic times.

The Collegiata of Saints Gervasio and Protasio, the city's patron saints, is Sondrio's main church and one of the oldest in Valtellina. Erected in the Middle Ages, it was modified many times and finally expanded in the early seventeen hundreds, erasing any remaining traces of the original structure. The current building displays a mixture of architectural styles, due to three distinct interventions; one involving the nave, in baroque style, designed by Pietro Ligari (1727-1739), another the presbytery, rebuilt according to neoclassical canons by Pietro Taglioretti (1797) and lastly the façade, redone by Giuseppe Sertoli in 1838. Inside, there are several canvases and frescoes worthy of note, by Pietro Ligari, Antonio Caimi and Giovanni Gavazzeni, and six lateral altars also designed by Ligari. Even the building of the bell

tower was a combined effort: the initial, ambitious design was Ligari's (1733), but financial difficulties drove the community to a more modest realization. The tower was begun by a native of Canton Ticino, Giacomo Cometti, but finished by the architect Pietro Solari. On the western side of the piazza stands Palazzo Pretorio, seat of the Grison government beginning in the mid fifteen hundreds and Sondrio's City Hall since 1861. From 1915 to 1917, the building underwent a radical refurbishment, assuming its current aspect. The project was headed by an engineer from Como, Antonio Giussani, whose inspiration was drawn from the iconography of the local Renaissance palazzos. The piazza is also the site of two interesting and important contemporary sculptures: the "Colonna dell'Adda" [The Adda Column] (1962), by Mario Negri, and the "Monument to the Resistance" (1968), by Livio Benetti.

The former, which stands in the fountain, consists of a decorated bronze base, on which the column rests, with two stylized figures atop it, while the latter, which stands in the planted area, features a monolithic base on which stands a group of figures in bronze: a patrol marching, followed by an allegorical figure of death.





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PIAZZA GARIBALDI / 02

Piazza Garibaldi, originally built under the Hapsburgs in the first years of the eighteen hundreds to serve as an entrance gate to the city in concomitance with the extension of the King's Highway [Strada Regia], was previously an open field. Originally named Piazza del Monumento, and then Piazza Nuova (to distinguish it from the "old" one, now Piazza Cavour), it took its present name from the bronze statue of Garibaldi, realized by the sculptor Confalonieri in 1909.

The oldest building in the square is the recently restored "Teatro Sociale" [Public Theater], designed in the neoclassical style by Luigi Canonica and inspired by La Scala of Milan. It was inaugurated during the Carnival festivities of 1824. The buildings added later exude a similar sobriety: Casa Lambertenghi (1826) on the west side, the Banca d'Italia building, the Grand Hotel della Posta and the Banca Popolare di Sondrio building on the south side. The piazza is closed by Palazzo Martinengo, built in the 16th century, shifted slightly to the north, whose gardens include a section of the medieval walls and an obelisk in white marble with allegorical figures, sculpted in 1834 by Giuseppe Croff.

PIAZZA CAVOUR / 03

Piazza Cavour, or Piazza Vecchia, is one of Sondrio's oldest squares; for centuries it served as the market square, where goods from all over Valtellina were bought and sold. It was also, originally, the way station for the Valtellina "pony express", along the Via Valeriana, the only road linking the settlements along the sun-kissed foothills of the Alps until the early eighteen hundreds. For many centuries, the footbridge over the Mallero torrent near Piazza Vecchia was the only connection between the town along the far bank and the quarter of Cantone, and it was also the site of the city's western gate in the 14th century, when the defensive walls were erected.

At number 10, there is a flight of ancient stone steps leading up to the Masegra Castle, named the Salita Ligari in honor of the famous painter from Valtellina, whose home it flanks. The piazza, ringed by buildings erected in the 18th century and with a central "market awning" added in Fascist times, is closed off at the bottom by a wall from which water gushes into a low fountain that mimics the ancient canals along the Mallero, known as the Malleretti.



PIAZZA QUADRIVIO / 04-08

Piazza Quadrivio takes its name from its original function, as the place where wagons and carts passed through and stopped (from “Carravium”, and later “Carrobbio”) after entering the town from the eastern gate, “Ponta de Prada”.

The small, ancient square lay between the area inhabited by the nobility (the “Via dei Palazzi”) and the commoners’ quarter of Scarpateggi. On the south side stands Palazzo Sertoli, a baroque building, on whose main floor is the sumptuous ballroom, the Salone dei Balli, with its spectacular frescoes and perspective views, attributed to Giovan Antonio Torricelli.

The palazzo’s gardens house an impressive collection of contemporary sculptures.

Slightly off center, in the piazza, stands a beautiful fountain, built in 1820, with a monolithic circular basin.

SCARPATETTI / 05

The ancient commoners’ quarter of Scarpateggi, which may have named after the Scarpategii, a Grisons family, has kept its traditional features almost intact: one sees plenty of typical rural houses, with wooden stairs and landings, stone “involts”, supports for oil lamps and stone benches.

Passing through the quarter up to the Masegra Castle, one sees signs of the people’s religious devotion: three small chapels dedicated to the worship of the Virgin, marking the three periods in which the street celebrated its holidays.

The first is dedicated to Maria Ausiliatrice, the second, at the level of the Schenardi stairs, is known as the “Madonna of the grapes”, because of the wooden statue (seventeenth century) of the Madonna and Child holding a bunch of grapes, and the last, near Masegra Castle, is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Maria.





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VIA DEI PALAZZI / 06

The itinerary known as the “Via dei Palazzi” winds along the ancient path of the via Valeriana, which crossed Sondrio along via Longoni, via Angelo Custode and via Lavizzari, finally arriving in Piazza Quadrivio. Along this route visitors can admire the houses of the old nobility, with their baroque portals, wrought iron balconies and vaulted entrance halls. In Piazzetta Carbonera stands the palazzo of the same name, a characteristic Renaissance residence. In Via Romegialli one can admire the former Casa Romegialli, Casa Rajna, a fresco by Pietro Ligari entitled “the Incoronation of the Virgin” (at the height of the intersection with Via Baiacca) and the figures of Saints Gervasio and Protasio (near the bridge over the Mallerio torrent). Crossing over the bridge, which was rebuilt as a drawbridge following the 1987 flood, and then crossing Piazza Cavour as well, one comes to the small piazza Angelo Custode [Guardian Angel], site of the church of the same name and of Palazzo Marlianici and Palazzo Longoni. The piazza is the point of departure of the picturesque lane named for San Siro, along which lie Casa Carbonera (which currently serves as the oratory of the church of the Guardian Angel), which vaunts an impressive spiral staircase built in the 18th century, and Palazzo Sassi de’ Lavizzari.

VIA FRACAIOLO / 07

Via Fracaiolo is a sort of open air museum, carved out under the rock (“crap” in the local dialect) of the Masegra, and visitors can still perceive the neighborhood’s original artisanal nature. Since medieval times, this has been the site of many craftsman’s workshops and artisanal businesses that used to utilize the waters of the Mallerio, channeled into the canals known as Malleretti, to power their equipment. The Malleretto canal, with its locks, is still visible, as are the roofed-over public laundries and the curious nymphaeum designed by Ligari, decorated in rockery style, with stones and seashells. From the washerwomen’s stations one can see the gardens of the Workers’ Society, founded in 1864 at the behest of Giuseppe Fumagalli. As in other quarters of Sondrio, the chapel devoted to the worship of the Virgin still stands, this one dedicated to the Holy Name of Maria.



THE VALTELLINA MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND ART / 09

The Museum of the City of Sondrio is located in an elegant aristocratic residence built in the 17th century, whose north side looks out over the “Via dei Palazzi”. Palazzo Sassi de’ Lavizzari, formerly Palazzo Salis, vaunts a richly inlaid stüa and vaulted halls decorated with frescoes, providing a precious context for extremely interesting collections offering visitors a panoramic view of Valtellina’s art and history and providing an essential key to the understanding of its culture.

This diverse and highly articulated museum is composed of several sections that interact with one another. The archeological section is also worthy of note, with many relics, some of which are of enormous importance (for example, the two inscriptions in pre-Roman characters), ranging from prehistoric times to the Renaissance. Other sections include the Fondo Ligari, with paintings, sketches, gessoes and tools from the famous family of Valtellina artists of the 17th and 18th century, the painting collection and the Sacred Art section of the Diocesan Museum and the sections dedicated to wooden sculpture from Renaissance times and to goldsmithing.





MASEGRA CASTLE / 10

The castle that overlooks Sondrio, erected in a strategic position at the entrance of the Valmalenco valley, is the only military structure in Sondrio of medieval origin to have reached modern times intact and is still in use, although over the centuries its function has changed. Its architectural structure also changed, leading it to the heterogeneous and stratified aspect it has today, so that Masegra Castle provides us with a visible cross section of the past 700 years of history in Valtellina.

Its history is complex. Originally a medieval castle, the seat of the feudal lords known as the Capitanei, rulers of Sondrio, it was damaged and rebuilt many times, especially in the thirteen and fourteenth centuries. In the 15th and 16th century it served as the elegant seat of the Beccaria family, heirs to the Capitanei. Towards the end of the century, it was ceded to the powerful Grison clan of the Salis Soglio, who, following the grievous and sanguinary events of the two decades that opened with the so-called “Holy Slaughter”, turned it into a flourishing agricultural estate. It was seized and returned to its military function as a garrison with the territory’s annexation by Napoleon and finally, after World War II, it became a military post. Today, the castle complex is owned by the municipality. Features of particular note include the Renaissance camera picta in the dovecote tower, whose umbrella vaulted ceiling is decorated with a beautiful cycle of frescoes depicting scenes from Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso.





STÜAS / 9-11-13

The stüa was the heart of the traditional home, whether rich or poor. It was entirely paneled in wood and warmed by a stove, usually in delft ceramic tiles, stoked from the outside.

The wood burned was usually Swiss pine or stone pine, which is resistant to temperature changes, emits a pleasant balsamic odor and is highly resistant to wood borers. Unfortunately, stüas were considered furniture, and so were often disassembled, sold or moved to other locations, or even broken apart so that the wood could be used to make “antique” furniture. In Sondrio, however, there are still several examples that visitors can admire, including three owned by the city.

The sixteenth century stüa Rigamonti in Palazzo Pretorio takes its name from the last family to own the building from which it came, formerly situated in the small Guardian Angel square.

Purchased by the city in 1954 and transferred to the mayor’s office, it boasts refined carvings and intaglio work. Also from the sixteenth century, the stüa Carbonera, in Villa Quadrio, made of stone pine, was originally in Casa Carbonera.

The wood paneling of the walls, darkened by a thick layer of paint, is composed of geometric frames in relief, reprised on the panels of the doors and cabinets. The ceiling features intaglio frames in circular and oval shapes.

The stüa Salis, in Palazzo Sassi de’ Lavizzari, dates back to the seventeenth century and is the only one of the three owned by the city to have remained in its original location. The walls are decorated with caryatids and in the middle of the ceiling there is a large panel containing nine coats of arms belonging to families related to the Salis clan.





MADONNA DELLA SASSELLA / 12

Situated on the Rhaetian slope outside Sondrio, the sanctuary of the Madonna della Sassella, perched on a rocky crag, can be reached by a panoramic trek through terraced vineyards.

The building dates back to the sixteenth century and consists of a church with a single nave, with an exterior portico and bell tower that were added in the ninth decade of the 18th century.

Above the main entrance portal there is an admirable lunette in white marble depicting the Nativity, and inside there are excellent frescoes attributed to Andrea de Passeris (1511), among them the cycle around the apse depicting the Virgin Mary and Christ the benedictor within a rounded lozenge, and the Evangelists and a

cycle of Prophets and Sibyls, as well as scenes from the life of the Virgin, in a band underneath it. Light reaches the apse through a multicolored stained glass window depicting the "Adoration of Christ the Child" (1520), by Domenico Cazzanòre da Blevio or an artist of his studio. On the outside wall along the ancient path is a gigantic Saint Christopher, patron saint of travelers. The piazza in front of the church, supported by sturdy arcades, is called the "terrace of the Valtellina" by the locals and was intended to serve as a deposit for the goods traded in the market.

Strolling through the vineyards and country homes, one can find incisions of human figures in the rocks, made in prehistoric times.



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VILLA QUADRIO / 13

Villa Quadrio was commissioned by the famous journalist, author and publisher Emilio Quadrio and built in 1913-1914.

The building was designed by a Milanese architect, Adolfo Zacchi, who drew his inspiration from architectural and decorative elements typical of the Renaissance, and especially from the Roman villa of the Farnesina.

While the architectural and decorative framework (the string-course ledges, the use of terracotta, the graphic motifs on the facades) is inspired by the Renaissance, some of the elements (like the portico's floral ornamentation) betray an art nouveau influence.

Inside there are a wooden choir and a beautiful stüa from the 16th century, both originally from the Guardian Angel complex. The great concert hall is quite impressive as well, with its ceiling embellished by spectacular stuccoes.

In 1935, the renowned violinist Teresina Tua, Emilio Quadrio's second wife, bequeathed the villa to the city of Sondrio, on the condition that it be utilized for cultural purposes; today, it serves as the city's public library.

PALAZZO MUZIO / 14

A timeless masterpiece of masonry, the building is situated at the hub of contemporary Sondrio, between piazza Garibaldi, piazza Campello and the railway station. It was designed by the esteemed Milanese architect Giovanni Muzio in 1930, to house the offices of the province, prefecture and police.

The building takes up most of the city block between via Vittorio Veneto and via XXV Aprile, linked by a covered passageway around which the structure stands. The two imposing towers represent, in hierarchical order, the Prefecture (the taller tower, on the west side) and the Province. With some modifications, Muzio adopted the features of the local architecture, like the lozenge-shaped incisions on the facades, and used stone from Valtellina and Valchiavenna, worked according to the local methods. The walls of the council hall are decorated with six encaustic paintings by Gianfilippo Usellini, dating back to 1934, depicting work typical of the Valtellina tradition.

Inside the offices of the Prefect and the President of the Province, Muzio designed two stüas made of Swiss pine and ornamented with geometric motifs.



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