The Gardens of the Italian Lakes
with Guest Lecturer Sir Roy Strong
and Nicola Howard

9th – 13th May 2016

The Ultimate Travel Company
Escorted Tours
The Gardens of the Italian Lakes
with Guest Lecturer Sir Roy Strong and Nicola Howard
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Nicola Howard
Nicola has a degree in History of Art and a background in fine art and photography. Having lived in Paris, Barcelona and Rome, she speaks fluent French, Italian and Spanish and has specialised in these countries, as well as in Turkey, North Africa and the Middle East, with a particular interest in the Islamic world. She has arranged tours for many art and garden groups.

Sir Roy Strong
Writer, historian, diarist, gardener and former Director of both the National Portrait Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum, Sir Roy is a prolific author on a wide range of subjects including British history and art, garden design and the history of eating. Passionate about gardening, he and his late wife, Julia Trevelyan Oman, designed one of England's largest post-war formal gardens at The Laskett in Herefordshire.
Sir Roy Strong, historian and garden enthusiast, and Nicola Howard take a delightful tour to explore in depth, often by special arrangement, the fine gardens on the shores of the northern Italian lakes of Maggiore and Como.

Our visit to the Northern Italian Lakes of Maggiore and Como will take us to one of the most scenic, verdant and unspoilt areas of Italy. The backdrop of the Alps and the humidity of the lakes has created a micro-climate favouring florid vegetation and offering ideal growing conditions for exotic trees and shrubs from all over the world. The horticultural tradition on the Italian Lakes dates back to Roman times: we shall see magnificent Renaissance and Baroque gardens in the formal Italian style, 18th century gardens influenced by French design, romantic parks in the English landscape taste and several more individual gardens. We will be staying in the renowned five-star, lake-side Grand Hotel des Îles Borromées at Stresa. As well as visiting famous gardens, such as those of the princely Palazzo Borromeo on Isola Bella and the historic Villa Carlotta on magical Lake Como, there will be a number of special visits to privately-owned gardens, adding immeasurably to our experience and enjoyment. We will be received privately for drinks and lunches and taste regional cuisine and wines.

**Day 1: Monday 9th May**

London / Milan / Stresa

Depart London Heathrow on a British Airways morning flight to Milan Linate Airport.

Lunch under own arrangements at London Heathrow. On arrival transfer by coach to Stresa, Lake Maggiore. Check-in to the five-star luxury Grand Hotel des Îles Borromées where four nights are spent. This grand hotel is surrounded by a beautiful garden and has a majestic view not only of the lake, but also of the Borromean Islands and the Alps. Rest of the afternoon at leisure. Introductory lecture by Sir Roy Strong and evening drinks and dinner at the hotel.

**Day 2: Tuesday 10th May**

Lake Maggiore

This morning leave by private boat for Isola Madre, the largest island of the Isole Borromee. Visit the house and gardens where peacocks, parrots and pheasants roam freely amongst the rare plants and exotic flowers. Isola Madre is particularly famous for its azalea, rhododendron, and camellia blossoms but also for the
pergolas of ancient wisteria and for the Cashmere Cyprus which is more than two hundred years old. The landscaped gardens, laid out in the English manner, were replanted by the botanist Henry Cocker.

Continue to Isola dei Pescatori, the fisherman’s island, for lunch at Ristorante Casa Bella. Continue by private boat to Isola Bella with its monumental Baroque palace and majestic Italianate gardens. A series of terraces are planted with roses, oleanders and pomegranates that descend to the lake. Return to the hotel for the rest of the afternoon at leisure. Dinner under own arrangements.

Day 3: Wednesday 11th May  Bisuschio & Casalzuigno
This morning depart Stresa by coach for Intra. Cross Lake Maggiore by ferry to Laveno, and continue by coach to Bisuschio.

Arrive at Villa Cicogna Mozzoni for a private lunch in the imposing 16th century Tuscan style Renaissance villa (by kind arrangement with Conte Jacopo Cicogna Mozzoni). The transformed hunting lodge is magnificently frescoed by the Campi brothers and surrounded by a formal Renaissance garden. The garden is built into the steep hillside and a spectacular water staircase, flanked by cypresses, descends from a small pavilion to face the windows of the salone. Continue to Casalzuigno to visit Villa Della Porta Bozzolo (property of Fondo Ambiente Italiano). The villa was built in the 16th century and in the 18th century an impressive Baroque terraced garden was added with water features. Continue to Laveno for a return ferry to Intra. Return to the hotel for dinner independently.

Day 4: Thursday, 12th May  Lake Como
Transfer by coach to Cadenabbia on Lake Como. Explore the gardens of the elegant 18th century Villa Carlotta. The gardens are known for the variety of rhododendrons and azaleas that flower in the spring, however the relaxed English-style garden and woodland has far more to offer. See a variety of ferns, a bamboo and rock garden, as well as magnificent trees that contribute to its horticultural interest. Cross Lake Como by ferry to Bellagio. Situated on the tip of a peninsular, the attractive town of Bellagio separates the two southern arms of the lake and commands panoramic views of Lake Como with a backdrop of the Alps.

Lunch under own arrangements in Bellagio. This afternoon walk from Bellagio through the lake side English style gardens of Villa Melzi d’Eril. The combination of the landscaped garden with rare exotic plants and the villa and chapel offer a wonderful example of the Neo - classical style. From Loppia take a private boat across the lake to Villa Balbianello (property of Fondo Ambiente Italiano). Its natural setting on a promontory and the harmony of the villa and garden render this one of the most impressive gardens of the
area. Continue to Tremezzo by private boat passing the lakeside gardens of Lake Como. Return to Stresa by coach. Dinner at the hotel.

**Day 5: Friday, 13th May Stresa / Milan / London**

This morning leave Stresa by coach (with luggage) for Brusuglio near Milan. Visit the garden of Villa Manzoni (by kind arrangement with Marchesa Barbara Berlingieri). Originally built in the 17th century, the villa was restored in the early 19th century by Alessandro Manzoni and his family, one of Italy’s most important novelists, poet and playwright. As a summer country house Manzoni developed a park land to surround the house with planes, chestnuts, magnolias and beeches and he also introduced some new species unknown at the time, such as the Robinia Pseudo Acacia (false acacia).

Private early lunch at the Villa Manzoni before continuing to Milan Linate Airport for a British Airways flight to London Heathrow arriving late afternoon.
Tour Price

COST PER PERSON: £2,170
Single supplement: £365

A fee of £95 per person will be charged for those who would like to travel out or back separately from the main group.

The tour cost includes:

- economy class scheduled flights as per the itinerary
- air passenger duty, passenger service charge, airline security charges, airport taxes and fuel surcharges where applicable - currently £61 (liable to change without notice)
- accommodation as shown in the itinerary
- breakfast daily; 3 lunches, 2 dinners
- all visits and excursions as per the itinerary
- all transportation as detailed in the itinerary
- all entrance fees
- gratuities in restaurants
- gratuities to guides
- porterage
- the services of your tour leader and guest lecturer throughout

The tour cost does NOT include:

- travel insurance
- items of personal expenditure (e.g. telephone calls / laundry etc.)
- government levies or taxes introduced after costing and publication of this programme on 29/07/15

Changes to the Itinerary

Please note, that certain elements of this itinerary, and/or the order of events, may well be subject to alteration due to circumstances beyond our control.

Fitness to travel

Whilst we do not impose any age limitations on joining a tour, participants must be reasonably fit. The very nature of the sightseeing involved in our tours means that a considerable amount of walking and standing is unavoidable on almost all tours. We regret that our tours are not suitable for people who have difficulty in walking, may require wheelchair assistance at any time, or are unable to keep pace with the group. If you are in any doubt as to the suitability of a tour, please make this known to us before you book and we will advise you accordingly. The Ultimate Travel Company reserves the right to decline a reservation without necessarily giving a reason. Your tour leader may also refuse to take participants on particular excursions if they feel that the rest of the group will be held up.
Airline Tickets
As a tour operator we have access to special airfares. While these offer good value, they do carry certain restrictions applied by the airline. Please ask us for details.

Note: If you are thinking about using air miles to upgrade to a premium cabin on the flights, please check with us first as fare restrictions might not permit this.

Accommodation
Hotels are chosen on the basis of category, character and location. The majority will be at least 4 star, otherwise the best available. The projected size of the group will often rule out the use of luxury boutique hotels. Sometimes the style of hotel will mean that not all rooms are of the same size or have the same outlook.

Health Requirements
There are no mandatory health requirements for visitors to Italy, and no inoculations are required.

Passport and Visa Information
Passengers should hold a full passport. British passport holders do not require a visa to visit Italy. Nationals of other countries should consult their local Italian Consulate. Please ensure that your passport is valid for at least six months from the date of entry.

FCO Advice
Travel advice issued by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office can be viewed at www.gov.uk/knowbeforeyougo.