



## **HOSPITALE (HOSPICE) AND CHURCH OF S. MARIA MADDALENA (ST. MARY MAGDALENE)**

**You can find this point of interest in Ossuccio - Path 1 - Stage 1**

### **INFORMATION**

**Location:** The *Hospitale* and church of S. Maria Maddalena form a complex located between the present Strada Statale Regina and the Old Via Regina in Ospitaletto di Ossuccio, on the banks of Lake Como, facing the Comacina island.

**Paving:** the internal courtyard of the *Hospitale* complex is paved with flagstones, with two cobbled lateral strips, approx. 1.5 metres wide in the part flanking the right handside of the church. The portico in front of the church of S. Maria Maddalena is paved with flagstones. The inside of the church is paved with stone slabs.

**Architectural barriers:** information on accessibility is available in the description of Stage 1.

**Access:** the path suggests to access the *Hospitale* of Ossuccio complex by the entrance alongside the old Via Regina, near the lake; alternatively one can enter from the far western end of the car park alongside the Strada Statale Regina, by walking the stairs leading downwards (5 paved steps, followed by a paved landing, then 13 steps – with a handrail on the right -, another landing and 5 more steps), which opens onto the inner courtyard. Access to the church is from the main portal by crossing a low threshold, or by the side entrance on the right, preceded by two steps. To arrange the visit please ask the *Antiquarium*.

**Services:** paid parking available in the area, automated teller machine, Municipal Police station.

**Leisure and food:** one bar-restaurant in the area, “Opera Pia Giovio” public park, which is used as a lido during the summer season.

### **DESCRIPTION**

*(Silvia Fasana)*

The first information on the *Hospitale* of S. Maria Maddalena is found in a will dated 1169, the year the Comacina Island was destroyed. The complex was built alongside the old Via Regina, very near the lake; it was therefore perfect as a post-house, where one could change or feed horses, i.e. a *stabulum* in Latin. The old road ran alongside the lake; the *Hospitale* opened onto the road, welcoming travellers through an imposing “ghiaandone” granite portal, which has now lost its original purpose, while the belfry of the adjacent church signalled its presence. Management was initially shared by laymen and lay brothers, the latter probably Benedictines, linked to the nearby monastery in the Perlana Valley; later on it passed under the “*jus patronatus*” of the Giovio family, whose role was officially acknowledged by Pope Alexander VI with a papal bull in 1496. At the death of the last descendant of the Giovio family, in 1907, the *Hospitale* became the “Opera Pia Giovio” Institution and remained active until it was suppressed in 1999 further to a decision by Lombardy’s regional council. The complex now hosts Ossuccio’s Town Hall and the *Antiquarium*.

The dedication of *Hospitalia* (Hospices) to Saint Mary Magdalene is quite common, as according to tradition this Saint is the sinner who in the Gospel anointed Jesus’ feet in oil and dried them with her hair, as a sign of welcome and service.

The Romanesque church sharing the *Hospitale*’s title was an appurtenance of the Hospice itself. Its single nave, with a semicircular apse facing westward, was decorated on the outside by a cornice of blind arches; in the course of time it was often refurbished to meet the varying needs of the Hospice. The church is famous for its beautiful belfry - shaped, too, in Romanesque style – which was heightened between the 14th and 15th century by adding a very peculiar Gothic bell-gable, which, due to the wear caused by the passing of time, was repaired at the beginning of the 20th century. This unusual gable made Lake Como renowned worldwide, almost becoming its symbol. In the 20th century the church, too, underwent rather drastic restoration work: amongst other interventions, in 1932 the ceiling vaults were demolished and replaced with a trussed covering, and the buildings leaning on the apse were knocked down; in 1937-39 the façade was “invented”, and the last nave was opened to become a portico. The church thus reached its present appearance, quite different from when it was originally built. What is left of its inner pictorial decoration is, in the apse half-dome, the

unusual representation of the *Zodiac signs*, and, on the side walls, fragments which may be interpreted as scenes from the *Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*. Only figures representing the Giovio family and a number of Saints, who probably surrounded an enthroned Virgin, remain of the painting on the counterfaçade, thought to have been made by 16th century Lombard school. The altar frontal is a scagliola stone work dated 1722, made by Pietro Solari, representing at the centre a *Repentant Saint Mary Magdalene* and the Giovio family crest. Again on the counterfaçade, a marble memorial stone acts as memento for the restoration of the church paid for by the Luzzani family and its consecration by bishop Alessandro Macchi in July 1939.

The side walls carry thirty-three oil paintings by Greek contemporary artist Petros Papavassiliou dedicated to the works hosted by the Sacred Mount of Ossuccio.

On the north wall of the first bay of the portico in front of the church, above a niche, one can see a stone frieze with *Monstrous beasts*, which art historians date back to the first half of the 11th century, the author of which remains unknown; under it, a 16th century memorial stone remembers the connection between the *Hospitale* and the Giovio family. A fragment of a late-Roman funerary stele was walled into the wall of the arch on the first bay, carrying a funerary inscription and a torch-bearing winged genius, framed by an arched architecture supported by spiral columns.