



breno
ART CULTURE TRADITION

INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL SERVICE

City Hall +39 0364.22041

Emergency 112

Pro Loco +39 0364.22970

Info Point Vallecamosonica

+39 0364.324093

infopoint@vallecamosonicacultura.it

Citizens: 4960

Altitude: 326 m s.l.m.

Distances: from Brescia 68 Km
from Bergamo 66 Km
from Milano 116 Km

HOTEL, RESTAURANT, BED & BREAKFAST

Hotel Ristorante Giardino0364.321184

Restaurant Alpino0364.21374

Restaurant Pizzeria Aquiletta0364.22503

Restaurant Taverna0364.22391

Restaurant Nido d'Aquila-Astrio ..0364.22537

Restaurant Tre Valli-Astrio0364.22204

Hotel/Restaurant Bazena0364.310777

Restaurant Crocedomini0364.310425

Restaurant Gaver0365.99325

Hotel Lago della Vacca337.441650

Bed & Breakfast Casa Antica0364.321750

Bed & Breakfast '900347.7255427

Bed & Breakfast La Casa Nera .335.6458329
(Hydromassage, sauna and turkish bath)

Restaurant Ca' Bianca0364.320059

Restaurant Pizzeria Matisse0364.320590



The History

Breno, nowadays as in the past, owes much of its importance to being the center of Vallecamonica's service district. This is due either to its geographical position and to its traditions.

A long history characterizes this town, as far back in the past as the Calcolitic era, as recent archeological studies performed on the Castel's hill have highlighted.

The etymology of the word Breno itself hides ancient roots, either if we assume it coming from the Celtic word "brig" (mountain) or from the surname "Brennas", Celtic as well, or the Gallic voice "briù" or "braé" (bridge or boundary post).

"It is then possible to imagine a boundary post, in the Gallic way, between the Castel's hill and Cerreto's hill, to close the entrance to the Valley"[Ertani].

In this groove the name of one of the hamlets, Astrio (Ohastre, castrium, the fortress), can be placed, which probably was the highest fence against foreigners [...]. Surely exploited against the Romans during the Augustan age.

These fences weren't enough to hold back the roman legion invasion for long though, and eventually Breno became part of the roman province.

Interesting prehistoric and roman finds can be seen at the civic museum.

Recently, in a small hood named Spinera, a huge roman religious premise has been discovered. It is placed between the eastern bank of the Oglio river and a spur rich of caves and springs, and it was probably built over a previous, indigenous one devoted to the cult of waters.

The religious premise, of Flavian age, is a typical Italian sanctuary, with a closed rear and an open front, probably with a colonnade. In the main cell, a niche was used to contain the cult statue together with a valuable mosaic flooring with decorations.

The building was destroyed by the fire, for sure intentionally set, around the V century a.d.. The sanctuary is currently under study and restoration.

Nothing is known about the Dark Ages. Indirect evidence, together with some archeological support of the Longobardian presence in the region, could be the dedication of the chapel to Saint Michele on the Castel hill. What remains are the counter-facade with an extended window, above which a Greek cross is placed, the foundation of the lateral left apse with signs of two other windows and the presbytery base, first mono and then three apsidal.

The chapel origins date back to the VIII century. In the following centuries it has been a cult place, until the construction of Saint Maurice's church or perhaps Saint Antony's. In 774 a.d. Charles The Great donated Vallecamonica to the monks of Tours. The periods of the communal and Seignory age have



been full of gloomy events, revenges, intrigues, relentless hates and cease-fires, as easy as fragile.

Offices and borders were the major sources of an exaggerated quarrelsomeness. The invasion of the Barbarossa unchained the hates against the rising Federici "*signoria*", whose most tenacious opponents are the Ronchi, The leone's and the Alberzani, from Breno, together with the "*families*" from the middle Valley.

It is only the beginning of a deep rivalry that will be handed on by history under the names of Guelfi and ghibellini.

The most general interests were referred to the control of the valley, more than to the fate of the pope's reign or the empire or to the independence from Brescia which would have ended to be more a damage than a benefit to the fighting factions: so that the general council of Brescia will be the one asking Maffeo Visconti a reconciling intervention, whose solution, dating 1291, will actually support only his own interests, stating that the ruler of Vallecamonica was chosen by the Duke of Milan and welcomed by the common of Brescia.

Since then, Vallecamonica becomes part of a "*larger political game*". Emperor Arrigo VII is interested in it in 1311, confirming only by the words of mouth the self-governing grants previously ensured by Federico Barbarossa (the certification is stored in the public library) and appointing as his deputy Cangrande della Scala.

The Visconti came back as soon as the transalpine "*shooting star*" passed by. Their rule (tied to the names of Bernabò, Gina Galeazzo, Giovan Maria e Filippo) will end with the peace of Ferrara, during 1428, which ratifies the end of the war between Milan and Venice. Since then, with the exception of a short French parenthesis, Vallecamonica will be a "*scolta*" of the Venice Republic and Breno will be the administrative capital (center).

The conflicts of the previous centuries eventually come to a conclusion thanks to the balanced and wise Venetian government that can match state needs with those of the local autonomy. Breno becomes the center of the government of the valley, entrusted to a Captain, a deputy and to a series of general and special councils, so to achieve a real institutional pluralism.

The "*excellent venetian dominion*" ends with the invasion by Napoleone at the end of the XII century. Vallecamonica is thought to have shown fervid loyalty to Venice at the beginning but, eventually, with the exception of some arrest of the most enthusiastic supporters of the venetian republic, with the installation of the Count Emili in Breno (April 1797), in quality of captain of the ruling population of Brescia, the period of the venetian domination can be considered finished (over).

Brescia province is subdivided into ten cantons, Vallecamonica being named "*the mountain*" with Breno as a center.



The cantons were subdivided in commons or municipalities that in Vallecamonica were: Pisogne, Darfo, Borno, Breno, Bienno, Capo di Ponte, Cedegolo, Edolo, Ponte di Legno. At the end of 1797, the Brescia republic is annexed to the cisalpine republic. Vallecamonica and Valtellina form the Adda and Oglio department with chief town first in Sondrio and then in Morbegno.

This department is again modified in 1801: Vallecamonica, in other words Breno's district, joins Serio's or Bergamo's department, under which it will remain until October 1859.

Detailed news about Breno, during the development of the Italian Risorgimento, have been provided by Fortunato Canevali in an interesting book full of data and pictures. The Risorgimento culture was mostly present in the valley with its "Garibaldian" and "popular" components, and those cultural veins will be the main drivers for reconstruction after the end of the second world war, when an intense program of civil and social works was carried out.

The Castle

20000 years of stratified history

At the end of the courtyard, at the base of the big tower, many important discoveries have been made. Thousands of years ago, glaciers covered this hill and prehistoric communities started occupying these territories. Hunters at the end of the Paleolithic age used to bivouac here, some 11000 years ago. Then a Neolithic farmer-hunter tribe came around 4000 b.c.

Their dwellings were made of wood and clay and they were used to manufacture baked clay pots finely decorated. An untouched tomb of that period has been found.

Between 3500 and 2500 b.c. these spots were visited by men of the Copper age. The end of the prehistoric age is characterized by frequent visits of commons of the II iron age, right before the beginning of the Roman rule.

Breno's Castle is not only a suggestive place, but it is a monument rich in history. What the visitor may observe is not, in fact, a simple "castle", but a complicated plot of premises built in different centuries and for different purposes.



It was first built as a set of palaces and towers, at the time of Federico I "Barbarossa" (1100-1200), and it was then transformed into a military fortress by the Venice Republic, ruler of Vallecamonica during XV and XVI century.

It partly lies above the remains left by prehistoric peoples, that had chosen the hill as a privileged spot for settlement, hunt or ritual attending, starting not less than 1000-11000 years ago.

On the top of the hill and on the steep south west side archeological research has revealed a series of prehistoric traces, very important for the historical reconstruction of the alpine peopling.

To the communities that first colonized the Valley, the hill offered a very attractive physical and lively landscape, sunny and rich of game, surrounded by forests and water.

A long history of human presence on the hill is documented. It started perhaps some 11000 years ago and developed mainly during the V and IV millennium b.c., the Neolithic period, the age of the first farmer-of-the-mountains tribes.

In a deep layer of the castle courtyard fireplaces have been found, chert splinter and butchered animals that reveal the most ancient traces of human presence in vallecamonica, at the end of the Paleolithic age (around IX millennium b.c.).

The castle construction has unfortunately cancelled many signs and an inhabited of the bronze age placed at the top of the hill in particular (around 1500 b.c.) that has given chert arrow tips and carbonized seeds.

After this age the occupancy of the region of Breno is likely to have moved towards the bottom of the valley, as some tombs, found around the "Tassara" football field and roman age findings, dated back to 450 b.c., show. (F.Fedele, "L'uomo, le alpi, la Vallecamonica – 20000 anni al castello di Breno", 1988 [F.Fedele, "The man, the alps, the Vallecamonica – 20000 years at Breno's Castle",1988]).



-  before 1000 d.C.
-  c. 1100 - 1250
-  c. 1250 - 1425
-  c. 1425 - 1600
-  archeological excavations
-  Church of S. Michele
-  house-tower
-  court

THE CASTLE IS OPEN

In the summer every days from 10.00 to 24.00. In the others seasons please contact City Hall or Pro Loco Breno.
Tel. +39 0364.22970



Minerva Medica roman Sanctuary

The Minerva Medica roman sanctuary in Breno was built during the I century a.d., in the same place where, from the V century b.c. the Camunni worshipped an indigenous divinity, whose Minerva herself was, so to speak, the heir (interpretatio romana): until the end of the IV century a.d. in fact the goddess cult was practiced in the sanctuary, to which the waters, considered healthy and coming from the caves to which the building itself leaned, were dedicated.

The architectonic installation, the mosaic works and the fresco paintings are preserved in most part, while many are the "ex voto" and the cult materials, either referred to the protohistoric phase, about which in particular an exceptional bronze votive plate of the V century must be reported, and the roman, let alone the wonderful statue of the Minerva goddess, built in pentelic marble basing on the Athenian model of the Pirro's Athena Hygieia of the V century b.c..

The sanctuary was destroyed by fire between the end of the IV and the beginning of the V century a.d.; the site was briefly exploited as a restricted installing area afterwards, and then it was definitely left and subject to floods by the Oglio river, that covered the remains until their discovery during the eighties of the last century.

The visit to the park represents a unique opportunity to experience a place which was considered holy for some one thousand years considering the protohistoric and historic age, but it could also be very helpful to understand the phenomenon of acculturation, of which an excellent example can be found in the meeting between the "Camuna" and the roman culture and in their capacity to live together and, for some aspects, blend with extraordinary outcomes.

The Churches

S. Antonio's church

In the place with the same name. It is one of the very few examples of neo-gothic architecture in Vallecamonica. It dates back to the end of the XIV century. Splendid portal in red sandstone. Inside a unique hall with cross vault .

It is famous because of the fresco paintings of the presbytery vault: "*Evangelisti, dottori della chiesa e Simboli Evangelici*" by Civerchio.

The other attraction is represented by the fresco paintings (again in the presbytery) accordingly attributed to Gerolamo Romanino. The definition of the themes and the chronology still remains very uncertain.



Unfortunately the general condition is one of fragments, removed from the now lost unity of their own narrative context.

The high altar piece portrays the *Blissful Virgin in throne among the saints Sebastiano, Rocco, Antonio Abate and Siro*.

This altar piece is now definitely attributed to Callista Piazza, who worked differently during the years twenties and thirties of the XVI century.

The last restoration, wanted by the local government and co-financed by the Bank of Vallecamonica, brought the fresco paintings back to their original splendor.

The parish church of SS Salvatore

With a seventeenth-century structure, it was readapted and widened during the nineteenth century. Magnificent portal with pillars dark lorgnette. Impressive bell tower built with granite boss. Baroque decorations in the bell cell.

The interior has been painted three times by Guadagnini (1852, 1870, 1873); An *Epifany* is placed on the counter-façade. *Resurrection. Maria's crowning and transfiguration* in the nave medallions. *Triumph of the Eucharist* in the presbytery vault and *multiplication of the bread* in the big lunette. The beautiful *Via Crucis* can still be attributed to Guadagnini.



In the middle of the wide presbytery, a monumental high altar built in 1740 by the marble-cutter Vincenzo Barboncini from Brescia. The altar is surmounted by the magnificent gold woody frame that contains the large painting representing the Transfiguration, by Pompeo Ghitti.

The second altar on the left side of the presbytery, rich in precious marbles, is dedicated to the Madonna of the Rosary and it was executed by the Fantoni's shop. The third one, in gilded wood, is attributed to Giovanni Piccini (1661-1725). The frontal is very valuable.

The altar, named "*of the Vatican II*", was built in 1865 by the archpriest Mons. Vittorio Bonomelli. Under his successor, Mons. Tino Clementi, archpriest of Breno from 1984 to 2005, the flooring has been restored, the big triduum machine (woody work in memory of the deaths in the village during the Black Death) has been cleaned and rearranged and the cornice gilding as well as the gilding of the pilasters capitals have been completed.

S. Carlo's little church

Aside the parish church. With a seventeenth-century structure.

S. Maurizio's church

Nearby the cemetery, former parish church, its fifteenth-century structure has been rearranged. The bell tower, with pyramidal cusp, has been recently restored bringing back to light the double lancet windows.

The complete restoration of S. Maurizio's structure and of the fresco paintings, painted

by the Venetian Ludovico Galliona (1752 – 1787), wanted by the archpriest Tino Clementi and led under the supervision of the superintendence, was completed in 2000, while previous works had showed the original masonry of the bell tower ascribable to the Romanesque.

On the presbytery left side, in the third chapel, the tribute to the regretted Beniamino Simoni is visible.

The precious collaboration of volunteers, especially “alpini”, has allowed the recovery of the neighborhood. Mons. Maffeo Ducoli, bishop of Belluno and famous fellow citizen, has given the organ, first very valuable work by Gian Luca Chiminelli, from Vallecamonica, and the altar for the celebration of the Saint Mass, work of local wood sculptors.

Little Degna’s church:

Inside, a valuable painting by the artist Domeneghini, from Breno.



S. Valentino’s church

The building, of the fifteenth century, is preceded by a renaissance porch. The interior presents two naves, with cross vaults. In the second and third vaults of the nave on the right side, fresco paintings by the Master from Nave, dated back to 1500, and showing the doctors of the church, are visible. On the wall, fresco paintings portraying saints and some fragments of 1484, probably by Giovanni Pietro from Cemmo. The valuable woody gilded altar, 1701, contains a beautiful oil painting ascribed to the painter Altobello Melone from Cremona, who was active in the Brescia region in the first years of the 1500. In the 2004 the restoration of the structure and the neighborhood was completed together with the restoration of the fresco paintings wanted and realized by Breno’s archpriest Tino Clementi with the supervision of the superintendence and with the help of many public and private institutions.



S. Maria al Ponte’s church

With a unique nave, with two side altars. A large pronaos, sustained by pillars of Sarnico’s stone, with decorated capital. Rich in decorations is also the portal in Simona’s stone. In the lunette above, a fresco painting portraying Maria’s nativity. On the right side, another portal of the same type of stone, in 1545. Again on the right side, leaning against the church a small, very interesting chapel, characterized by beautiful proportions and by a very elegant seventeenth-century architecture.

In the year 2000 the restoration of the structure was completed, including the interior and the Renaissance votive chapel. Again the works have been realized thanks to the interest of the archpriest Tino Clementi with the supervision of the superintendence.

The funds for the pictorial works came from “generous friends” while the neighborhood was restored by people living in the quarter named “Ponte” (bridge).

The Towers and the Villas

The four medieval towers

They probably date back to the XII-XV centuries and in the beginning they were the expression of the power of the main *Guelph families*:

Via Mazzini Tower

A squared plan, with a masonry of granite blocks. Restructured in 1994-95 is now the seat of the Pro Loco.

Walls of Domenighini's house

Aside S. Antonio's church, its base is made of massive granite blocks.

Walls of Pezzotti-Gobetti's house

In Via Cappellini. Of the original tower two sides can be seen in correspondence of the porch (portico). Access to the portico is guaranteed through a portal, whose ashlar form a round arch.

Pezzotti's tower

In Via Tonolini. Its most important characteristic is the boss in the upper part.

Palace of Via Garibaldi

Portal and small Loggia in red sandstone from the XV century. Future seat for the library and the museum.

Parish house

On the façade, a portal with a twin lancet window, of medieval or maybe even Longobard age, together

with a *Crucifixion* coming from the church of the "disciplini" from Ceto are visible. Inside, an elegant great staircase made of Sarnico's stones.

City hall

Once Villa Ronchi, patrician dwelling owned by an ancient family with some quarters of nobility. It was then given to the commune at the end of the second world war with the large garden of which only the central fountain remains. Inside, decorated ceilings and a valuable Celesti's "*Mosè saved by the waters*".

De Michelis' villas

Villa in Cambrant resort, with paintings in fresco from the XVI century.

Villa in the centre of the town with a very beautiful garden.

Ghezza's villa

Dealing with this impressive building, someone has talked of "east fancy". The owner, the lawyer Maffeo Ghezza, designed it looking up in texts and copies (reproductions). Something like what happened to Emilio Salgari when he described the far-east without having ever visited it. So remarkable in the designer is the love for the Arabic style and the holy Islamic text, the Koran, to the point of writing some of its lines on the outside walls.

Its building started in 1929, a year of world and valley deep economic crisis. People were

grumbling about the waste and the offence to the poor. The answer didn't come late: under a terrace the lawyer ordered to write (this time in Italian) "People say. What do they say? Let them speak!".

Marketplace

Now dedicated to Gen. Pietro Ronchi. It is of very ancient origin, probably born as a "drill ground" for those who were trying to beset the Castle, as, in 1453, the famous captain of fortune Bartolomeo Colleoni (1400-1475) did.

A wonderful crown of ancient dwellings and palaces mainly from the XVIII and XIX century surrounds the place, especially Franceschetti's house, probably built over a previous premise. A story tells of a secret tunnel, drilled in the rocks and connecting the Rocca and the premise named Fumo Hotel.

Beautiful is also the central fountain.



Air-raid shelter

Near the Marketplace there is an Air-raid shelter built under the Castel in the second World War.

For visit it:

Pro Loco Breno +39 0364.22970

City Hall +39 0364.22041



Surroundings

As a crown for the chief town are the charming hamlets of Pilo Campogrande, Pescarzo, Astrio and Mezzarzo, lying on the hill sides that rise towards the Alta Guardia mountain.

Beyond the inhabited areas, the view widens out at north on the rocky cliffs of Concarena, at north-east on the southern spurs of the Adamello, and at east on the steep face of Pizzo Badile. An enchanting landscape at the base of which, vines, meadows and woods lie.

Astrio

In a wonderful panoramic position, lying among meadows and woods, offers the opportunity of relaxing either summer and winter staying and it is also the starting spot for the excursions to Crocedomini and Bazena.

The Saints Vito, Modesto and Crescenzia's parish church, with an eighteenth-century line, has an interesting portal in dark lorgnette, dated 1787.

Pescarzo

As Astrio, it lies beside the main road to Crocedomini. In these years the real estate has undergone a huge renovation. The S. Giovanni Battista's parish church (between XVII-XVIII century) keeps works of a certain value.

Mezzarzo

Placed in a wonderful hollow, at the foot of the Eremo's hill, it is easily reachable going along the road that links Breno to Bienno. It has preserved its identity of an agricultural village, surrounded by gardens and meadows.

Excursion from Breno to Bagolino

It can be made through the state road n°345, named of the three valleys, very interesting for the variety of the landscapes.

Leaving on the left S. Maurizio's church and S. Valentino's sanctuary and, slightly above, the inhabited area of Pescarzo, it is possible to rise, walking in a winding road having a wonderful view over Breno and the middle valley.

Rising again, after Astrio, the valley of the valleys and Campolaro, a summer resort, come, followed by Bazena's hollow (m 1799 above the sea level).

A panoramic muletrack leads to the Valfredda pass, then to the Vacca's pass and eventually to the Vacca's lake (m 2357 above the sea level). Nearby the dam, the "Titta Secchi" refuge can be found. It is the starting point for the n°1 foothpath of the Adamello.

From Bazena, through a bare environment, passed the steep slope, subject to landslides, the Crocedomini pass is reached, ancient boundary between the Venetian republic and the territory of the bishops of Trento.

A number of "malga" (shepherd's hut in the Alps) are there, where it is possible to buy typical local foodstuff.

Carving on the right side and passing through the Maniva's pass, the Goletto gadino, which is the highest point of the journey, can be reached.

Turning, the street then descends towards the valley of the Cadino stream, at the height of the Goletto di Gaver firs appear again. A characteristic of the wonderful Gaver Hollow is the abundance of snow which makes of this place a well known center for winter sports.

The street keeps on descending towards south passing through the alpine Caffaro valley and the Dirizzo and Bagolino-s ones.

The Events

Patronal festivities

Breno

February 14th – S. Valentino's day

Mezzarzo

May 24th – SS Maria Ausiliatrice

Pescarzo

June 24th – S. Giovanni battista

Ponte

September 8th – Nativity

Astrio

November 11th – S Martino

Titular festivity of the parish church

August 6th – Transfiguration of our lord Jesus Christ

The stake of the old woman

Half Lent Thursday

"Spongada" fair (tipical cake)

Palm Sunday

Ronchi's square market

The second and fourth Thursday of each month

Breno's May

Breno's may is organized by the *PRO LOCO* and by the *DEALER'S ASSOCIATION* during the last decade of the month.

The event is centered around S. Antonio's square, in the heart of the old town center.

Shows and exhibitions are held during these ten days. The most important event is the Art Prize (Award) City of Breno to which artists of national reputation take part.

Feast of the Assumption in Breno

Organized by the *PRO LOCO*. During august the Castle is opened to visitors. In Market square, cultural exhibitions, concerts and parties are held.

On August 15th, great conclusion with the traditional fireworks having the castle as a striking background.

Very interesting in the last few years has been the exhibition named "*Camunerie*", recreation of some important moments of the history of Vallecamonica and in particular Breno.

The Cuisine

Recently, the following gastronomical products from Breno have been recognized and included in the circuit of **products DE.C.O.**:

- "Caicc": big ravioli dressed with local typical cheese, gilded butter and sage;
- Sausage of castrated: typical delicatessen from Breno, easy to cook and with a peculiar taste;
- "Spongada": typical "focaccia";
- "Salam de brè".

Other traditional dishes:

- Breno's way barley soup;
- Misdeeds with herbs;
- Risotto with frogs;
- "Dirty" soup with minced chicken meat;
- Strinù: fresh barbecued "salame";
- Camuno goatling, oven cooked, with millstone flour polenta;
- snails in "sguasset" in "pinzimonio" (sauce of oil, vinegar, salt and pepper in which raw vegetables are dipped);
- Polenta with wild fowls with pork loins rolls;
- "Surprise" with spinaches;
- Chamois and hare salame;
- Salt meat dressed with parsley and onions;
- Oglio river trout oven cooked with white wine;
- Typical barbecued cheese rinds.

Thanks to

Comune di Breno



COMUNE
di BRENO

Testi

Prof. Eugenio Fontana
Prof. Ermete Giorgi
Prof. Francesco Fedele

Curato da

Prof. Franca Avancini Pezzotti

Fotografie

Studio Fotografico
Battista Sedani



Studio grafico

Factory Design
di Ghetti Claudio



Stampa

Tipografia Camuna





Pro Loco Breno

Via Mazzini - 25043 Breno (BS)

Tel. **+39 0364.22970** - info@prolocobreno.it - :prolocobreno

www.prolocobreno.it