

**BRESCIA**

**Your (kind of)  
tourist guide**

# **Unmissable Sights**

**Seven wonders of a world-city**



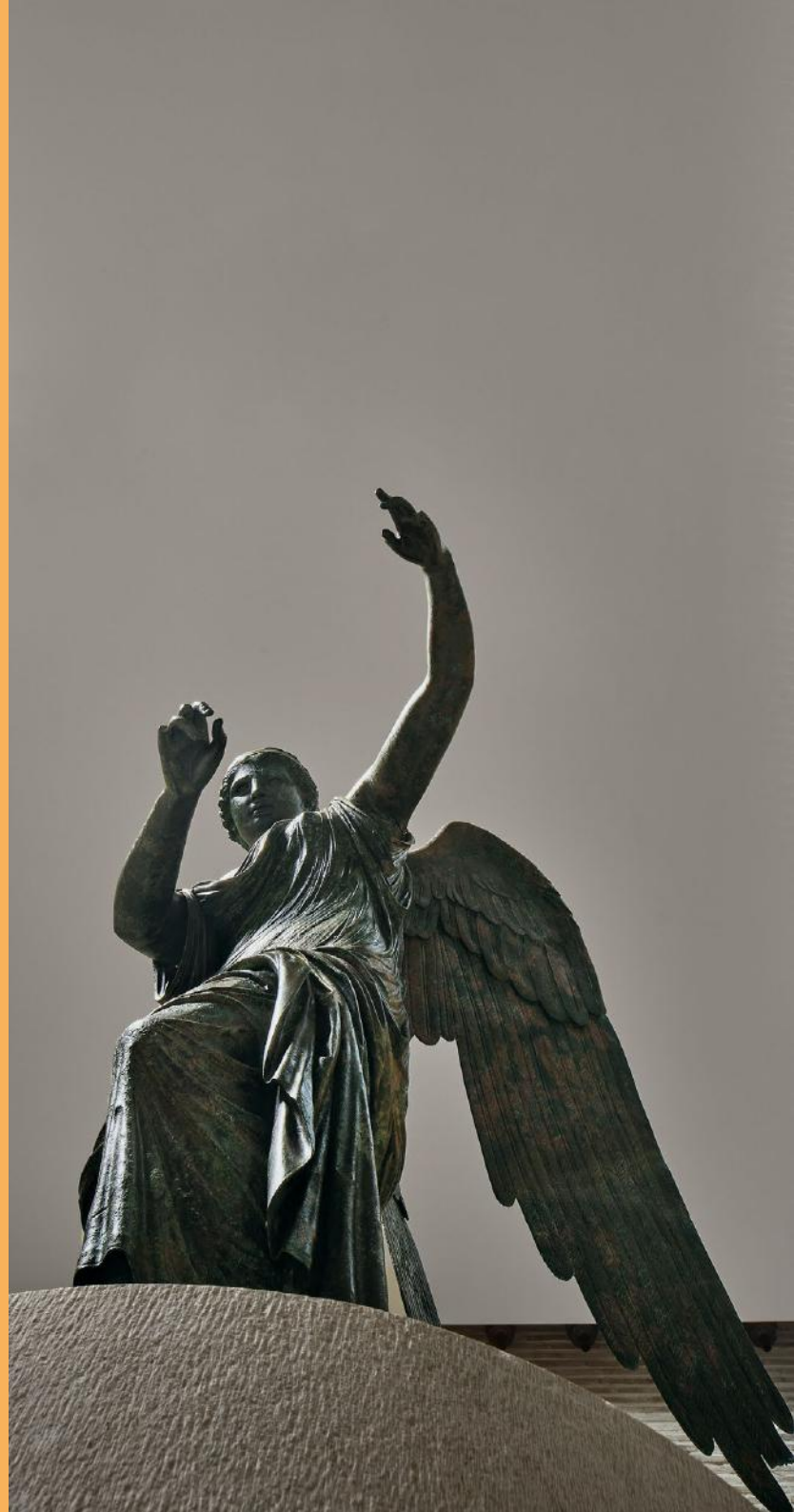
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# The Winged Victory

THE HIDDEN CENTRE OF BRESCIA

1





**She doesn't look you in the eye. But she sees you. She is a woman made of bronze, almost two metres tall. For over two thousand years, she has withstood the passage of time, lootings, slapdash restorations, and wars.**



© The wings of the Winged Victory, during restoration

created locally. And yet the Winged Victory remains an enigma.

And perhaps what's most important is to immerse yourself in the mystery, rather than try to unravel it. After all, the spell of ancient, classic art is universal... thus always contemporary.

The Winged Victory is graceful and mysterious. It has withstood the relentless passing of centuries, the collapse of the Roman Empire, the abandonment, silence. The clumsy attempts at restoration and the adventurous movements of the 19th century, and then the World Wars in the 20th century.

**It is one of Brescia's most famous symbols. It is unique yet reproduced everywhere:** from the Louvre in Paris to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and even a version personally commissioned by Gabriele D'Annunzio for his Vittoriale. In 1915, a giant replica stood on the shores of the Pacific Ocean at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, organised to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal, where it had the rather challenging role of representing classical Italian art.

But who is she, really?

Perhaps she is a deity, perhaps the personification of military glory.

Undoubtedly, she is a work of art dating back to the ancient times of Roman Brixia. Or perhaps even older, and coming from distant lands.

Some argue that the statue was made by Hellenistic craftsmen, made in the Greek Egyptian area, and later transported to Brescia through the trade or military routes of the Empire. Certainly, some details – the drapery, the stance, the rendering of the face – closely resemble other famous Greek models such as the Winged Victory of Samothrace or the Venus de Milo.

Its origin has been the subject of long debate. But today, after a careful restoration entrusted to the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence, things are now sure: originally, the Winged Victory held a shield and rested her foot on a helmet. Minerals from the province of Brescia were found in its casting grounds, which means that it was





The Winged Victory was discovered in 1825 while excavating among the ruins of ancient Brixia, the Roman city built at the foot of the Cidneo hill. Today, the area is one of the most important archaeological parks in Northern Italy, in the very heart of the city centre.

We can only imagine what a thrill it must have been for those who, for the first time in centuries, brushed against her bronze skin, finally returning it to the light, one centimetre at a time.

'E par che viva', wrote Giosuè Carducci in a verse dedicated to her. "She seems alive".

Today she is more alive than ever: following restoration, she was returned to public display in 2020. She is back in the Capitolium, the temple dedicated to the Capitoline Triad, in a new room designed by architect Juan Navarro Baldeweg. She is bathed in light calibrated right down to the millimetre, which allows to look at her even more closely and get the feeling that she's watching you back.

Whether you're aware of it or not, your trip to Brescia will always revolve around her. Around her strength, her grace, her mystery, that can never be diminished.

© The modern installation of an ancient masterpiece

Ma tu guarda,  
Brescia to listen to!

Episode 4

# Millennial and/or contemporary



Beneath your feet and above your head, Brescia expresses its avantgarde nature through the languages of contemporary and street art.

Are you ready to get lost in a museum without walls and chase a flying rhinoceros?



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# The Castle

WITH THE SURLY LOOK OF THOSE  
WHO CAN KEEP THEIR SECRETS

2





You can spot it from afar, perched on the Cidneo hill, overlooking the city like a sentinel always on duty. It has been a Roman place of worship, a Visconti garrison, a Venetian fortress, a French outpost, an Austrian barracks. And today? It is an urban park, a place in which the city stops to rest; where you go to breathe, to remember, to admire in silence the stunning sunset.



© Cidneo Hill, home to the castle; the first human settlements here date back to the 4th century BC



It is hard to imagine, in this suspended stillness, the frantic whirlwind of history that surrounded this castle.

In March 1849, it was the site of one of the most heroic pages of the Italian Risorgimento: the Ten Days of Brescia.

While Milan and Venice surrendered to the Austrians, Brescia resisted. House by house, window by window, the people of Brescia fought like lions against the imperial army. Women carried ammunition in their aprons, children acted as relays, priests provided food and courage. Ultimately, they were defeated. But they earned the honour of posterity and gained a name for their city: Leonessa d'Italia, Lioness of Italy.

This name is still engraved on the top of the hill, at the entrance to the **Risorgimento Museum**, which is housed inside the castle, in the Grande Miglio. This contemporary, interactive museum is designed to tell the story of both the battles and the ideas, the passions, and the people.





© The monumental entrance to the castle, which connects the Bastione di San Marco to the Bastione di San Faustino

And there is more. The Mastio Visconteo houses the **Luigi Marzoli Weapons Museum**, one of the most important weapons collections in Europe, featuring intimate displays of swords, helmets, armours, crossbows and bombards.

Outside, you can pass under **Mirabella Tower**, the oldest part of the castle, built on top of a late Roman building. Peek through the ramparts and admire the views from the castle walls over the red roofs, domes and bell towers of Brescia, with the plain in front and the mountains behind, in the distance. Breathe in the beauty and history. On summer evenings, you can enjoy the many events held at the castle, when the austere fortress becomes a vibrant theatre.



# I Màcc de le Ure

TWO AUTOMATA OVERLOOKING  
THE MOST ICONIC SQUARE

3



Even before you can see them, you can hear them, if you cross **Piazza della Loggia** at the right time, precisely on the hour. Dong... dong... The chimes are unmistakable, as they have been for almost five centuries.

There they are! On the top of the **Clock Tower**: Tone and Batista, as they have been called forever. Two copper automata who have sounded the hours since 1581, striking the bell of the astronomical clock with their hammers.

For the people of Brescia, they are simply known as: Macc de le Ure, or the 'madmen of the hours'.



© The astronomical clock, built between 1544 and 1546

Why 'madmen'? Well, once upon a time, they didn't always get it right. Today, however, they are very punctual.

As soon as the chimes stop, take a look around. **Piazza della Loggia** is the heart of the city, a masterpiece of elegance, measure, and balance.

Designed in the 15th century, when Brescia was under the Venetian rule, it has maintained perfect harmony despite (or perhaps we should say, thanks to) the continuous changes introduced over the centuries. There is **Palazzo della Loggia**, with its clean Botticino marble facade, which today is the seat of the city administration. Inside, you can visit Sala del Consiglio, Sala Giunta and Salone



© Piazza della Loggia with Porta Bruciata tower in the background, entirely rebuilt in the 13th century

Vanvitelliano. Opposite, there is the arcade: the central part of local social life. On the other side is the Clock Tower, where Tone and Battista, the two automata, sound out the hours with their hammers. The history of Piazza della Loggia has seen both peaceful times and great turmoil, such as the Risorgimento uprisings, the Ten Days of Brescia: the monument to Bella Italia, in the north-east corner of the square, is a memorial to the martyrs and fallen. Again, in the last century, on 28 May 1974, a bomb exploded and shook the city and Italy as a whole: a stele commemorates the innocent victims of the attack.

But time most often knows how to be gentle. It knows how to heal wounds,



both individuals, and whole societies. Time occasionally interrupts its linear travel to mix past and present. If you look towards the southern side of the square, there is the old Monte di Pietà building, which is divided into two identical parts – **Monte Nuovo di Pietà** from the 1600s and **Monte Vecchio di Pietà** from the 1400s – with a gallery in the middle leading to Piazza Vittoria. Now take a good look at the walls of the gallery and the facade. Do you notice the Roman inscriptions? They were unearthed during the 16th century and are considered the oldest example of civic lapidary in the world.

Piazza della Loggia is Brescia and Brescia is Piazza della Loggia. It has a quiet and subtle elegance.

© A detail of the Monte Vecchio di Pietà



It is the past that is not afraid of the future. It is the awareness that a city can be its best self only when it opens up to the world.

Our advice is to return at different times of the day and year: in the morning, when the slanting light caresses the marble statues; in the evening, when the warmth of the streetlamps lights up the arcades. In spring and summer, to listen to outdoor concerts; at Christmas, when the city comes together to enjoy the festive atmosphere. Each time, the square will speak to you in different ways.

Only the chimes of the Macc de le Ure will always remain the same, precisely on the hour.

**Ma tu guarda,  
Brescia to listen to!**

**Episodio 5**

# The city as a musical score



From the timeless notes of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli to the urban beats of Frah Quintale.

With the fifth episode of the podcast *Ma tu guarda, Brescia to listen to!*, you can leaf through the musical history of Brescia like the pages of a musical score



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# From Duomo to Duomo

TWO CATHEDRALS IN THE SAME SQUARE

4





Brescia is an active and constructive city, where people keep their feet firmly on the ground. But when you look closely, beneath (and beyond) the surface, you can glimpse a city of faith. And this faith has over the centuries been transformed into stone, brick, stucco, and Botticino marble: the material used to build the magnificent churches and monasteries that still watch over the city, as precious havens of silence preserving artistic masterpieces.

© The Duomo Vecchio, in the foreground, and the Duomo Nuovo, immediately behind



In the (kind of) guide on tourist routes, there is an entire tour devoted to places of worship. Here, instead, we focus on a single square, which aptly bears the name of a Brescian pope, **Paolo VI**. A square where you feel the breath of spirituality.

One faith, two faces that couldn't be more different.

**The Duomo Vecchio** is round, severe, ancient. It seems more a sculpture than a building, as if it emerged from stone itself. Built in Romanesque style, construction began in the 11th century, but the underground crypt goes as far back as the 6th century.

When you step inside, you immediately leave the buzz of the city behind, immersed in a sacred semi-darkness, with light filtering through the surrounding arches and frescoes appearing on the walls, survivors of many centuries.







The **Duomo Nuovo**, which stands right next to the Duomo Vecchio, speaks a different language, combining the exuberance of the Baroque with the grace of Neoclassicism.

It took more than two centuries to build. Construction began in 1604 and it was completed – with many interruptions – in 1825, with a dome 80 metres high, the third tallest in Italy.

The white Botticino marble facade hides an interior in which light plays on every detail. The side chapels are home to artworks by Brescian masters, such as Giambattista Pittoni, while the high altar dominates the space like a visual vanishing point.

© Duomo Vecchio: the twelve lambs representing the twelve apostles, in a mosaic dating back to the 6th century

© In Piazza Paolo VI there's also a symbol of secular power: Palazzo del Broletto, the medieval seat of governors (here, a detail of the façade)



© Palazzo del Broletto in the foreground, with the Torre del Pegol overlooking the square

Some say the two cathedrals are, after all, like mother and daughter: the former the custodian, the latter the exhibitionist. One whispers, the other sings. They are the past and the future, supporting each other. It is difficult to find a more accurate and complete image of our city.



# Teatro Grande

AND THE PRESTIGIOUS BRESCIAN  
MUSICAL TRADITION

5







**Darkness. You have taken your seat. Everyone sits in silence. Your heart quickens a little. Lights. The curtain rises. But the magic began earlier. Back at the foyer, with the mirrors, chandeliers, the sophisticated buzz. Then in the charming horse-shoe shaped auditorium, with the red boxes, the gildings, the frescoes. This is Teatro Grande, the musical heart of Brescia.**

© The  
sumptuous  
Sala Grande

Built in the Seventeenth century as the home of the Accademia degli Erranti, it houses the majestic Sala Grande (Great House), inaugurated in 1810.

If its walls could speak, they would describe the perfectionism of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, a Brescian virtuoso pianist born in 1920. They would tell the story of 28 May 1904, the day when King Victor Emmanuel III was in the audience, and *Madame Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini was performed.

The composer was nervous, he had never been so tense. The same opera had been a flop at its premiere at La Scala in Milan, so he had decided to completely rework it in just three months. The new Brescian premiere ended up being a huge success, with an interminable roar of applause.

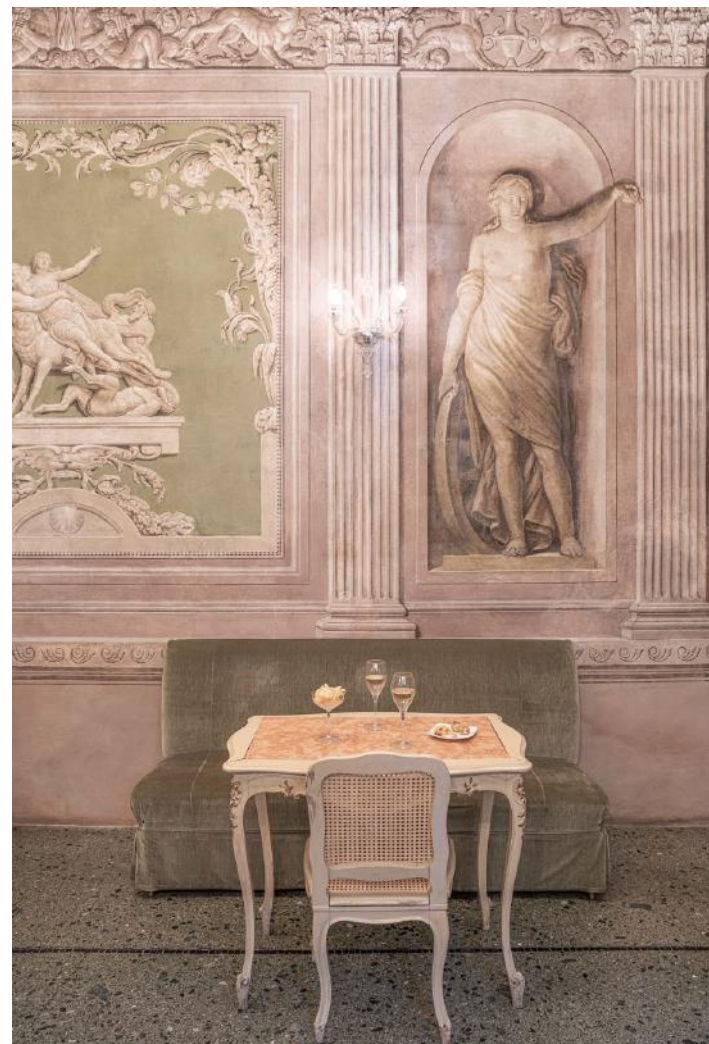




© View from the stage

From then on, Puccini would be forever grateful to 'the cultured and gentle' city of Brescia and its people.

The walls of Teatro Grande, however, are not imbued with the melancholy of storytellers harking back to a glorious past. If you listen carefully, these walls can tell you about the furious applause last night, when the curtain fell at the end of the ballet. They will tell you about the superstitious rituals adopted by the Argentine tenor last week, as he sought to tame his emotions before taking the stage. They will list all the dates for this season, so you can mark them down and book your tickets.



© Caffè del Teatro Grande – Berlucchi

Oh, before we forget! One word of advice: if you happen to be at Teatro Grande during the weekend, take a break at the Caffè del Teatro Grande Berlucchi, located inside the Ridotto: a delightful corner of stunning 18th-century opulence that will leave you speechless and a great place for really good drinks!

# Among the Vantiniano tombstones

THE FIRST MONUMENTAL  
CEMETERY IN ITALY  
(DID YOU KNOW IT?)

6







**Before Rodolfo Vantini, no one in Italy had ever come up with the idea of a monumental cemetery. A local Brescian engineer, architect, and visionary, he devoted much of his life to designing and building this grandiose city for the souls of the dead.**

It was 1804, and Napoleon had just issued the St. Cloud Decree. It established that burial grounds had to be built far away from towns and cities for practical and hygiene reasons. Brescia, which was under the French rule at the time, acted quickly. A suitable place was identified: the countryside just outside Porta Milano. As early as 1810, Bishop Gabrio Nava blessed the site, making it ready to receive the first burials.



But it is all so cold, barren, bare. There's nothing wrong with practicality, and public hygiene... But beauty is essential to give at least some consolation. Thus, the city announced a public call for projects to beautify the cemetery.

The winner was Rodolfo Vantini, who at the time was just over twenty years old. And with the enthusiasm and ambition of youth, this genius architect did not limit himself to a couple of embellishments: he conceived a monumental city to house the remains of illustrious figures and ordinary people alike. A model that would later be imitated all over Italy: from Milan to Rome, from Naples to Genoa.





© In the shade of an arcade at the Vantiniano

Just a short walk from the historic centre, where everything is a little quieter and the streets are greener, you will find the gate to the Vantiniano Cemetery. A central avenue, with arcades on either side, white columns, statues, epigraphs, small family temples: every corner tells a story. The melancholy of lost time and the living memory of those who built Brescia. Walk slowly. Pay homage to entrepreneurs and poets, heroes of the Risorgimento and benefactors, exceptional men and women, and ordinary men and women just like us. The neoclassical architecture welcomes you, the cypresses guide you, the sky gets bigger and bigger.

Standing over all the souls of the Vantiniano, the living and the dead, is a tower 60 metres tall, with a lantern on top. This is the lighthouse: a fixed point that seems to show the way back or the shore from which one has departed, which are often the same place.

**Ma tu guarda,  
Brescia to listen to!**

**Episodio 6**

# An aperitif and three desserts



To start, Pirlo and Bertagni!  
To finish: a traditional biscuit, little cubes once adored by D'Annunzio, or the favourite dessert of Iginio Massari.

The sixth episode of **Ma tu guarda, Brescia to listen to!** is a journey through the city's food and wine culture, featuring four products labelled **Denominazione Comunale (De.Co.)**.



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# Pirlo and Bertagnì

THEORY AND PRACTICE  
OF THE BRESCIAN APERITIF

7



**The seventh wonder of our cosmopolitan city comes in a glass and on a small plate. It's an inescapable ritual.**



First, the basics: it's not a spritz. Pirlò is not a spritz (although we admit, it certainly looks like one).

Its origins are lost partly in legend and partly in necessity. Apparently, the name comes from the verb in local dialect *pirlar*, meaning 'to rotate slowly', referring to the circular movement required to mix the wine with aromatic bitters, according to the traditional recipe. But tradition in Brescia, as we know, is alive, always open to innovation. So here is the modern recipe for Pirlò: three parts local white wine; two parts aromatic bitters, one part soda; a twist of lemon. Pirlò was invented in local bars and working men's clubs, a popular accompaniment to a game of cards after a long day at work. This spirit remains the same, but now the cocktail is served in elegant bars, used to toast a successful deal, or to kick off a fun-filled evening out at the end of the week.

What do you eat with a Pirlò?

Whatever you like. But if you are looking for something special, something you won't find elsewhere, ask for a Bertagni: a *baccalà* (salted cod) fritter, battered and golden, simple and tasty.

What else is there to add?

Nothing. Cheers!



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## An aperitif and three desserts

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a traditional cookie, the cubes adored  
by D'Annunzio, or the dessert most loved  
by Iginio Massari...



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Saturday – Sunday 9 am – 5 pm



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Saturday 9 am – 5 pm



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Brescia,  
La Tua Città  
Europea.

BRESCIA

Your (kind of)  
tourist map

Unmissable  
Sights  
Seven wonders of a world-city

1

## The Winged Victory

Brixia. Parco Archeologico di Brescia romana, Via Musei 55



2

## The Castle

Via del Castello 9



3

## I Macc de le Ure

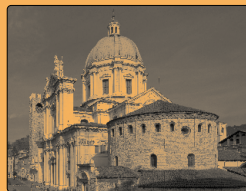
Piazza della Loggia



4

## From Duomo to Duomo

Piazza Paolo VI



5

## Il Teatro Grande

Corso Giuseppe Zanardelli 9/A



6

## Among the Vantiniano tombstones

Via Milano 17

