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The Long Weekend

■ EUROPE

On a Hill in Italy

Frank Lloyd Wright called Bergamo “a city of marvels.” Stendhal was even more breathless, naming it “the most beautiful place on Earth.” But for all the talk about Italian hill towns, this close-to-Milan treasure is often ignored by Americans.

Bergamo, population 117,500, is a city in two parts. Ancient, walled Città Alta (high) charms with overlapping rooftops, bell towers, domes, and spires. Gothic, medieval, and Renaissance structures seemingly defy gravity on craggy slopes, as do terraced farms and storybook sheep. Città Bassa (low) is the commercial center, where merchants first set up shop in 1620. To take a break from commerce and antiquity, head to Galleria d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, recognized internationally for its provocative exhibits.

Bergamo’s funicular—a cable railway to negotiate steep inclines—was installed in 1887. Atop the higher station, the pastries, panini, and prosecco at Caffè della Funicolare come with a wide-angle view. A short walk leads to the 1137 Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore; its 14th-century fresco of the Last Supper is the “don’t miss” here. Next door is Colleoni Chapel, a Gothic and Renaissance tomb that looks like a marble homage to argyle.

Dinnertime, head to the 1357 palace where



Pretty, prosperous Bergamo beckons with a mix of culture, history, and day-to-day charms.

Da Mimmo, a welcoming pretense-free fine-dining restaurant, serves Bergamo’s own pasta creation, *casoncelli* (or *casonsej*, in the local dialect): ravioli stuffed with sausage, parmesan, and bread, graced with melted butter and sage. Don’t stick around for dessert; instead, enjoy gelato and a sparkling nighttime view at La Marianna.

Small businesses abound in Bergamo. Look for cashmere knits handmade by two sisters at La Bottega di Nonna Betta. Men do well at Stelio, where striking silk ties cost \$16 and finely tailored cotton dress shirts are a good buy at \$46.

The two-star Agnello d’Oro is walled-city

central. Rooms here evoke guest quarters in a real home; the staff is warm and helpful. Not fancy; just right. —ANN COCHRAN

LOGISTICS: From Milan’s Malpensa Airport, Bergamo is about a 40-minute drive. Trains depart Milan and Rome hourly. Agnello d’Oro, 035-249-883; from \$90. Ristorante Da Mimmo, www.ristorantemimmo.com, lunch and dinner. La Marianna, dining upstairs, www.lamarianna.it, lunch and dinner. La Bottega di Nonna Betta, Via Colleoni 3. Stelio Portici Sentierone, 46 035-226-131. Galleria d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, www.gamec.it.