If you have chosen this itinerary then we’ll be starting off in front of the magnificent church of St. Zeno: our aim is to discover some of the historical “celebrities” who have made Verona famous for their merit, and for their.......Smiles!!

From San Zeno, after having been introduced to the “Fisher Saint”, we will walk together beside the river Adige as far as San Zenetto, a tiny church that hides a huge curiosity! Just a short walk away the majestic Castelvecchio (“old castle”) is waiting to reveal all the secrets hidden within the ancient fortress: Cangrande 1, high on his pedestal welcomes us in with a smile. In the Museum picture galleries there is a young red-haired boy who poses us an enigma from the painting he inhabits.....
Once we have finished in the museum we'll rest for a moment under the shade of the Gavi Arch before setting off again on foot along Via Roma, bustling with shops, to walk as far as the Maffeiano Museum where we will continue our hunt for ...... unusual “smiles”!

We’ll meet up in the square in front of the church of San Zeno: even the outside of the basilica is a true masterpiece!

The church was built between the 8th and the 9th centuries, on the site of the tomb of one of the best-loved bishops of Verona who was actually proclaimed patron saint of the city. St. Zeno. “Zeno was of African origin; he lived during the 4th century a.d. and became the eighth bishop of Verona. He was a strong and generous man who loved to be with his people. He has gone down in history as being the “fisher saint”, and tradition has it that he was responsible for miracles and extraordinary happenings. It is said that one day, while he was concentrated on his fishing, a passer-by asked him why someone so important as himself should waste so much time on such a totally useless pastime. Zeno didn’t
answer, but, just a few seconds later he had a “bite” on his hook…. Something very heavy. In fact it wasn’t a fish at all, but a man! The poor thing had been swept away by the current and had drowned. St. Zeno brought him back to life, and from that day onwards he found that he had the nickname of “fisher of souls”.

Obviously the real message behind this tale is that St. Zeno used to save people by fulfilling his role as father of the church, bringing people closer to God through prayer and the simplicity of his behaviour, and thereby “fishing” them back from the darkness of evil.”

After the earthquake in 1117 which destroyed many buildings in Verona, the church was rebuilt in a relatively short time, between 1120 and 1138. That might seem like a long time to you, but you must realise that in those days the construction site for cathedrals had no cranes or diggers or, in fact any of the modern machinery that we have nowadays, and so the building work used to go on for decades. The results were excellent, also because the basilica still retains the same coherent and harmonious (Romanesque) style throughout.

Look carefully at the façade: if you have got some binoculars then you can have a good time following all the strange characters who animate the countless stone “comic strips” The large panels on either side of the great door are actual illustrated stories “On the left hand side there is the story of Genesis sculpted by the craftsman Master Nicolò; while on the right side is the Life of Christ by Master Guglielmo. Lower down you can find stories of famous kings and knights in arms of olden times. Underneath the protiro (the huge marble “porch” which sticks out above the doorway and is supported on two column-bearing lions). Look carefully at the sculpted transom window where St. Zeno, right in the middle is thwarting Evil in the shape of a monster, and is welcoming the foot soldiers and knights who come to pay him homage. The colours painted on the red marble are authentic, although it is curious to know that the standard held by the flag bearers has been repainted a number of times, depending on who was the current ruler of the city!”

Now look at the bronze doors which many people think are the most important feature of this church…. Each one is made up of twenty four panels where both New and Old Testament stories are narrated, along with the miracles worked by St. Zeno, and the lives of some of the other saints. We do not know who sculpted these
panels (at least two different craftsmen between the 11th and the 13th centuries). What is incredible is the extraordinary “liveliness” of the tiny figures who sometimes seem to be almost “jumping out” of the scenes that they are starring in, as though they wanted to actually live out their past adventure all over again.

Let’s take a last look at the church façade so as to admire the enormous rose window, known as the “wheel of fortune”, and around which six sculpted figures representing human existence are set, as well as a Latin inscription which is translated like this: (try reading it out loud!)

“It is I, Fortune who decide the destiny of mortal men. I raise up; I command; I distribute all that is good and all that is evil. I clothe the naked, and I strip those who are richly adorned. If anyone trusts themselves to me then they will be mocked.” The sculptor who signs his name is Master Briotolo.

Normally the entrance to the church is through the door on the left side, through the magnificent cloister which is all that is left of an important Benedictine abbey. Enjoy yourself by going all the way round it and “studying” the different angles and perspectives created in each corner by the long rows of columns. You can also try to identify all the animals and the symbols that have been sculpted in the grave stones and on the stone tomb-covers which are conserved in the corridors….. there are a lot of famous people who have been buried here, and the Abbey was well-known to kings and even emperors who often used to stay as guests. Now, let’s go into the church: you do know, of course that from now on you must be quiet and well-behaved because holy places must always be respected, no matter what your own religion may be. You will notice straight away that the inside is made up of different areas: lengthwise, the church is divided into three naves and the ceiling is hull-shaped….. a “nautical” term which describes the building style using sea-faring language. Then there is an “upper church” (you have to go up some steps and past a stone railing to get to the altar) as well as a underlying crypt where St. Zeno himself rests in peace! If you want to go and pay him your respects, go down the steps and through a “thicket” of splendid pillars…… watch carefully for the capitals which are highly adorned with strange and fascinating carved figures.

Now, it’s time for us to list four ‘unmissable’ things inside the church that you must find for yourselves:
1. **The huge porphyry basin** “as legend has it, was brought here by the devil at St. Zeno’s command. It may be a thermal bath dating back to Roman times: the red porphyry stone comes from far-off Egypt!”

2. **The Triptych by the artist Andrea Mantegna.** “This three-sided altar-piece was painted around 1400, and is famous throughout the world. It shows the Madonna and the Saints who are talking happily together with a lot of young children and angel musicians, and Mantegna’s real brilliance lies in the fact that he invented an incredible background upon which to set his scene – all made up of pillars and painted arches which “interact” with the ones that are sculpted in the wood of the frame so as to give the impression that the loggia is actually real.”

3. **The lion and the ox, both made out of red marble** “They represent the evangelist apostles – one St. Mark, and the other St. Luke. These two beautiful animals bear the weight of the ophitic pillars (i.e. the ones that are paired and “knotted” together) of the altar in the “lower church”.

4. **St. Zeno laughing!** “Discover the massive niche where St. Zeno is sitting on his throne and welcoming you with a huge smile, with his crosier (symbol of a bishop) in his hand, and from which …… a fish is hanging! This 13th century statue was sculpted from Veronese red marble and it is still painted in its original authentic colouring.”

Let us take our leave of the saint, and return to our open-air activities, turning left up the street that runs alongside the river Adige, and is called the **Regaste San Zeno**: Go up the stairs that lead to a raised walkway overlooking the river, because from up here you can enjoy a particularly good view……. Then, go down the stairs you will find, just level with the small oratory of St. Zeno (San Zenetto) on the opposite side of the road. It is well worth crossing the tiny, charming gardens so as to get in and see, over on the right hand side, the enormous stone upon which (tradition has it) St. Zeno used to sit when he was fishing!

If you carry on down the road you just left, you will already be able to see the walls of a massive historical castle, because you have arrived at **Castelvecchio**. “This huge fortress was built in the middle of the 1300’s at the wish of a **della Scala** prince called Cangrande 11 (be careful not to mix him Basically, he
was a real tyrant, and the Veronese people used to invent nicknames for him such as “Rabid Dog” (because the “Can” part of his name actually means “dog” in Italian). The towers and the crenellated walls, crowned with a “swallow’s tail” pattern, are an obvious indication that the Scaligera family were Ghibellines, and thus on the side of the Emperor during Medieval times, as opposed to being Guelphs who were all princes and nobles who fought on the side of the Pope.

Originally this castle had a really beautiful name – it was called San Martino in Acquaro. It was only later that it started to be called “The Old Castle” after the two new castles of San Pietro and San Felice had been built.”

As we go into the Castle courtyard you will immediately realise that the enormous parade courtyard has been revamped and beautified with a little garden and fountains flowing into basin, 

up with Cangrande 1!) who no longer felt safe in his normal home in Piazza dei Signori. 

s forming sheets of water: The entire complex of buildings you can see here has changed a great deal over the course of the years especially since 1926 when Castelvecchio finally stopped being used as a military stronghold and became a museum, open to everyone. Much later on, during the 1960’s, a top architect called Carlo Scarpa was asked to carry out a definitive restoration project on the castle and to adapt it for use as a museum. What you can see today is the result of his meticulous research and his great passion for art…… which is why we are asking you to pay great attention to the building materials and to the actual shapes he has used in the constructions which both house and at the same time exalt the exhibited masterpieces”.

From the entrance where the ticket office is, you will immediately find a series of exhibition rooms which illustrate the history of Medieval Veronese sculpture in the form of statues, sculptures in relief, decorative remains and architectonic elements. You can enjoy yourself by looking at these extraordinary exhibits from all sides in order to absorb some of the details that you are learning to recognise! (Also, read each room’s visitors’ information sheets to find out more). Carry on then through the various galleries as far as the glass door exit where you can stop for a moment to admire the great bronze bell on your right…… it’s chimes used to peel out in 1300 in Piazza Erbe (where it hung in the Gardello Tower). And if you look carefully you can see that here too there is an engraving portraying St. Zeno while he is fishing! Go through the very ancient Morbio
doorway and you will find yourself in the private garden belonging to the *della Scala* Palace. The best way to visit the Palace is by “climbing up” the *Mastio* Tower (42 metres high). On the first floor of the Palace, do go and see the ancient sword belonging to Cangrande 1 della Scala, a great prince who died in 1329, and nearby there are some highly precious jewels from the same epoch which were used to adorn both the men and the women in the family. Moving onwards, stop at the fourth room in this part of the museum where, on all four of the walls you can admire the frescos that have miraculously survived. They look almost like a very old fabric, and the patterns are reminiscent of the far east…….. In the same room, don’t miss the two paintings which are turned towards the far wall because they are amongst the most beautiful in the entire collection. One is the “Madonna with a Rosary” by Stefano di Giovanni, and the other is the “Madonna with a Quail” by Pisanello (for these too, read the information sheets if you want to know more). Let's go on more quickly if you like, as far as the second floor of the Palace where you can look around and see other masterpieces, or else go directly to the inside of the *Mastio* Tower to the weapons room where swords, shields, helmets, bits of armour, halberds, falchions, iron-shod sticks and much, much more are all exhibited. You can find it all! But lets get back to the open air, to where the mounted statue representing *Cangrande 1 della Scala* is waiting for us on his plinth.

“Cangrande 1 was the best known and best loved of all the Lords of Verona. He only lived to be 37 years old, and during this time he managed to conquer all the neighbouring cities, reaching as far as the gates of Venice. Historians and contemporary chroniclers describe him as having been a strong, and often ruthless leader, but at the same time, an extremely agreeable sovereign; cultivated, generous, and generally good tempered. He made Verona rich and powerful and ordered the building of new city walls, whilst artists, writers, scholars and philosophers flocked to his court where the most important of all his illustrious guests was the great Dante Alighieri. (see Itinerary number 1)”

A close study of this important statue reveals a number of curious and fascinating details. “The laughing knight is wearing an elaborate helmet reaching down to his shoulders, and with a crest in the shape of a “winged” dog’s head…….. even the horse is wearing an almost identical smaller version of the same thing! (both the dog and the ladder are family emblems, while the wings are an imperial “standard”). Both the knight and his steed are facing towards us and the heavy trappings the horse wears seem to
be flapping in the wind, whilst Cangrande is raising one hand (which used to hold the sword) and pointing his feet in the stirrups in such a realistic manner that...... you can almost see him moving! This, in fact is what makes this statue so very special, because even though this is a component of the funereal monument dedicated to the great warrior, the sculptor, who is nowadays known as Maestro del Cangrande, wanted to give us the true likeness of a living person who was alive in the 14th century, and yet seems to still be with us during the centuries that followed.

Can we say that he succeeded?

(If you want to find out more about Cangrande’s armour then read the chart beside it).”

Let’s leave our noble friend here and go into the Gallery where numerous paintings by famous artists up to the 18th century are waiting for us...... Remember that I had already mentioned that you were going to meet someone who is really nice, but just a bit mischievous – a boy with red hair...... Try and find him somewhere in the first room that you come to. You will be amazed to discover that this young boy looks out at us with his mischievous smile from a portrait painted in 1500 by a great Veronese artist called Gianfrancesco Caroto. But what on earth is he showing us? Is it his own drawing? Maybe he wanted to paint a portrait of you - to make fun of you ...... whatever it is, we will never ever know! The real beauty of this portrait lies in the way the boy wants to get us to “play” with him, and the way that his smile and his expression seem to have been captured as though in a still photograph where we can “read” to a certain extent something about his own life and character.

If you carry on now, through the various rooms, let yourself be carried away by your own imaginations, “drowning” yourselves in the world of imaginary stories inspired by many of the paintings you will see. We will be waiting for you at the exit, where we will go on with our itinerary.

Make your way out of the Castelvecchio courtyard and cross over the drawbridge situated beneath the Clock Tower. The plaque attached to the façade of the Tower tells you that just nearby, in the middle of the road, there used to be an important monument dating back to the Roman era. The Gavi Arch. “The Arch, which dates back to the first half of the 1st century a.d. was built in the honour of the Gavia family who were one of the most important Veronese families in Roman times. It is a “four-sided” arch made from white
limestone, and it is even signed by the architect who designed it: Lucio Vitruvio Cerdone. It was built outside the city walls, on the ancient Via Postumia where it welcomed anyone entering Verona from a southerly direction, testifying to the city’s beauty and to the wealth of its inhabitants. Nowadays the Arch has been moved from its original location (if you look carefully though, you can see the large stones which marked the original positions of the bases of the four pillars on the paving stones.) Would you like to know where it ended up?

The Gavi Arch stayed in its original position right up until 1805, the year in which it was destroyed by Napoleon’s French soldiers who were occupying Verona because, being in the middle of one of the main roads it stopped the troops, their wagons and canons from being able to pass. For many years the remains of the Arch were conserved inside the Arena. Finally in 1930 it was rebuilt, not far from its original setting, and if you would like to see it for yourself, then all you have to do is to go along the short stretch of pavement that runs alongside of the old moat, walking in the opposite direction to Castelvecchio. You’ll soon get to a small square with a few trees overlooking the river Adige, and in the middle of which stands the Arch.

Now that it is right here in front of you, look at it carefully, and one of the things you will be able to observe is that some parts are less ruined than others (in fact these bits are not actually authentic, but have been made to fill in for a missing piece that was lost or destroyed). On the main sides of the Arch you will see that there are some empty niches, each of which used to hold a statue, but which have now all been lost. If you pass under it, you will be walking on the paving slabs of black basalt stone that were used in Roman times to cover the roads (and where you can still see the furrows made by their wagons as they thundered past!). At this stage, there are two alternative itineraries that we can suggest: One of these is to carry on imagining that you are in Verona as it was 2000 years ago, and you can set off from here at the Gavi Arch and go along the main street called Corso Cavour and which follows the course of the ancient Via Postumia. In Roman times this stretch of road was actually outside the city walls, and was surrounded by fields and orchards and lined with tombs and funereal monuments. Then, at the far end of the Corso you will find the thoroughfare blocked by a huge arched stone structure which was one of the ancient city gates, and which gave entry into the city centre: This is the Borsari Gate, “the Via Postumia which was one of the most important consular Roman
roads, crossing the north of Italy from Genoa to Aquileia, led into Verona through this gate. Nowadays you can admire its white stone façade which was built during the 1st century A.D and originally stood between two towers. In ancient Roman times Porta Borsari was called Iovia after a small temple nearby dedicated to Jupiter. It’s modern name dates back to the Middle Ages when the “Bursarri” demanded a toll fee from anyone entering the city” and from here you have access right into the heart of Verona, amidst streets full of amazing shops. If you carry straight on then you will get to Piazza delle Erbe (see itinerary 1).

If, on the other hand you want to discover some of the other “smiling” characters that abound in our city, then you should go all the way down Via Roma as far as Piazza Brà at the far end where you should turn right. Just a few steps along here should take you to a very unusual place, called the Maffei Lapidariaan Museum. “The Museum contains a collection of antique headstones (“lapis” in Latin means “stone”) and also inscriptions carved on a variety of surfaces, mainly marble, terracotta and stone. It is the oldest lapidary museum in Europe and is one of the most important of its kind. It is situated beside the Accademia Filarmonica which is an association founded in 1500 by a group of Veronese music lovers” which contains the private “collections” once belonging to a noble Veronese gentleman in around 1700. He was a marquis, and was called Scipione Maffei. “He was a highly cultured academic, and his main interests lay in antiquities and in the theatre. In 1710 he became a member of the Accademia Filarmonica, and from then onwards he dedicated his time to classifying and expanding the Accademy’s epigraphic collection. Maffei listed and described in detail all the objects in the collection in a work entitled Museum Veronese (1749).”

Maybe you too collect things – stamps, or cards or coins – and you already know just how passionate a collector will feel about wanting to find new “pieces”, either buying or swapping advantageously until his collection is complete. Maffei was like that too, and for more than twenty years he used to search out and buy anything that interested him: ancient stones (from the Latin lapis which means “stone”) and all sorts of other objects made out of hard materials, such as statues and funeral urns bearing inscriptions (epigraphs) in different ancient languages (especially Greek, Latin and Etruscan. His collection of epigraphs which was the first of its kind in Europe, was opened to the general public, and for more than a century, visitors to Verona came to look at what was reckoned to be one of the wonders of this city. The Maffeiano Museum was completely renovated in 1982, and modern day visitors too can admire the tombstones, headstones, statues and funerary urns (which used to hold the ashes of dead people who have been cremated) and everything else that it contains. Exhibits on show come not only from the area around Verona, but also from the ancient far east, from Greek, Roman, Etruscan, Christian and medieval sources. Amongst all these remains, lets go and see the ones that are “smiling”.
There is a Greek *stela* (remembrance) stone that was placed on the sepulchre of a young boy called Gaio Silio Bathyllo who lived 2000 years ago. Facing outwards, Gaio is shown between his two parents who are gazing fondly at him, while a small dog is curled up at his feet. In the background there are two masks leaning against a pillar, and which might be a clue that the family had something to do with the theatre.