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The GPX tracks of the routes are available
on our website, on the book's page.
www.ediciclo.it

Andrea Bellavite, born in Verona and a Goritian by adoption, is a professional journalist. He has taught theology and held various positions in the fields of international cooperation and social assistance. He has served as both a parish priest and the mayor of Aiello del Friuli. A passionate traveller, he was one of the founders of the *Heavenly Way and Iter Goritiense* (the Way of Gorizia). He has written several works on the Gorizia area and numerous articles for journals devoted to political, archaeological, philosophical and theological culture. Among those published by Ediciclo are *The Spirit of the Feet*, *The Basilica of Aquileia*, and *Gorizia Nova Gorica, Two Cities in One*. He currently serves as Director of the Basilica of Aquileia and manages the journalistic blog storieviandanti.blogspot.com.

Nace Novak, born in Šempeter pri Gorici, is a journalist, traveller, and the author of travel reports. He graduated with a thesis on travel reporting and, over his 30-year journalistic career, has worked for television, radio, a press agency, and various newspapers and magazines. For many years, he acted as a correspondent for several national media outlets covering the Gorizia area and documented his journeys in numerous reports. In 2004, his book *Camino – From Nova Gorica to Compostela* was published by Goriška Mohorjeva družba, and in 2022 *Along the Heavenly Way* was released by Novi glas. He enjoys undertaking journeys mainly on foot, but also by bicycle. He is currently a project manager at the Franciscan convent of Sveta Gora and head of the Peace and Good Centre on Mount Santo.

Mattia Vecchi, a native of Gorizia, has produced films such as *The Land in the Blood* (2010), *Behind the Darkness* (2011), directed by Giorgio Pressburger and written by Claudio Magris, and *The Mystic Life of St. Veronica Giuliani* (2016). He co-founded and directed the film production and distribution company *Sine Sole Cinema S.r.l.* in Gorizia, and collaborates with institutions and cultural organisations to intertwine storytelling, memory, and promotion of the cross-border region. One of the founders of *Iter Goritiense* (the Way of Gorizia), he is currently project manager and head of communications for the Patriarchal Basilica of Aquileia.

Photos by Mattia Vecchi (unless otherwise indicated)
English translation: Sara Cechet Woodcock
English language editing: Murray James Bales
Cartography: Enrico Raoul Neri
Communication partner: TMEDIA S.r.l.
Layout: Fabrizio Masi

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Andrea Bellavite Nace Novak

Photos by Mattia Vecchi

The Way of Gorizia

A 4-stage route from Aquileia to Sveta Gora





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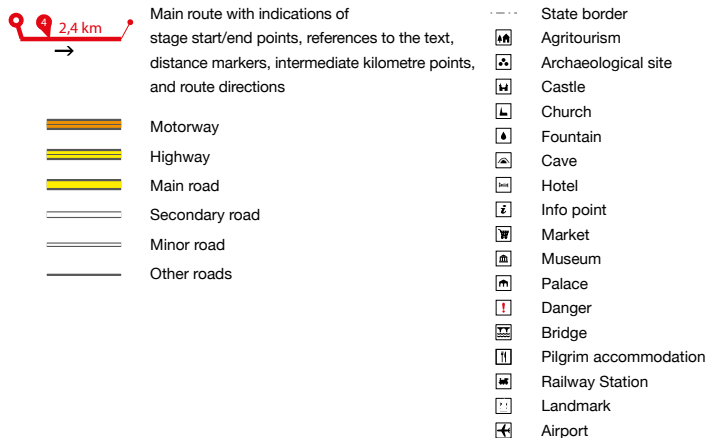
Introduction

Dear traveller, right from the start, it is clear that the Way of Gorizia travels through two countries: for people from Slovenia, it is called Goriški Camino, while for all others it's *Iter Goriense*.

The Way was inspired by friendship. In 2025, when Nova Gorica and Gorizia were presented to the world as the "European Capital of Culture", several projects were offered and funded as part of the Small Projects Fund GO! 2025 of the Interreg VI-A Italy-Slovenia 2021-2027, managed by GECT GO. The Society for Preserving the Basilica of Aquileia and the Sanctuary of Sveta Gora participated in one of these calls for the purpose of building bridges of friendship and brotherhood between people and cultures. And what could have been better suited than the Way to accomplish this wholesome goal?

The 4 (or more) days of the journey by foot (or bike) cater to a range of needs, and provide a brief, yet wonderful opportunity for the lovers of 'slow tourism', especially those without the time or resources to take on more challenging itineraries.

The route holds great cultural importance, giving focus to the harmonic relations between people who in times gone by suffered many conflicts. Our



The Sanctuary of Sveta Gora



itinerary starts in Aquileia, the cradle of civilisation in Central Europe and core of early Christianity, and the custodian of the mosaic floor of one of the world's oldest basilicas. The path leads past villages steeped in history, and the banks of the River Isonzo (Soča, in Slovenian), which European populations regarded as sacred. It crosses the hills of the Karst, right between First World War trenches, visiting places infamous for the pointless conflict responsible for hundreds of thousands of corpses, but also remembering Giuseppe Ungaretti, Prežihov Voranc, and many other figures from the realm of literature whose poetry celebrated these territories.

The path follows a border which appears as a testament to the absurdity of all borders, which is hopefully now a thing of the past. Along the way, Gorizia and Nova Gorica, two cities in one, symbols of how harmony and peace can establish a new, extremely positive way of living together, where differences in language and culture are no longer an obstacle, but the foundation for a new, beautiful coexistence. While Gorizia was mentioned for the first time in an official document way back in 1001, Nova Gorica's forming started in 1948. Yet the two realities, apparently so different, are today a role model for cooperation and solidarity, with each offering the other its special features of ancientness and modernity. Before ascending the final part of the route, you can stop and glance at the stone railway bridge with the largest span in the world. And, finally, the itinerary reaches Sveta Gora, one of Slovenia's most visited sanctuaries, providing breathtaking views from the sea all the way down to the Po plain, from the valleys of the Isonzo River and of the Vipava to the highest peaks of the Julian Alps.

At the same time, it is a religious itinerary for those who experience it as a pilgrimage to the origins of their faith. Aquileia and San Canzian d'Isonzo remind us of the legendary foundation of the local church by evangelist Saint Mark, the saga of the countless martyrs who gave their life for Christ, the last of whom being the young Canzio Canziano and Canzianilla. The rugged hills of the Karst invite us to reflect on the harshness of war, recognising the specific mission of any authentic religious form: to build peace and acknowledge that we all possess equal rights, and to state the importance of dialogue among those who believe. The enormous Peace Monument of Cerje enables us to contemplate the many signs of faith that can be found on the plain of Gorizia: the sanctuary of Miren, the bell towers of the town and villages around the main cities, the ancient monastery of Kostanjevica and, finally, right up there, the final destination of our itinerary, the sanctuary of Maria, the Sveta Gora, with its rich and complex history, that was founded following the claimed appearance of the Madonna to a little shepherd girl from the village of Grgar in 1539.

For those looking for more athletic challenges, Gorizia's itinerary offers remarkable possibilities; apart from the demanding walks of the first two long routes, the first on the plain, with the second one going down and

uphill on the ridges of Mount San Michele. Especially in the Slovenian part (Solkan), in the area of the three evocative bridges over the Soča, those who want to train both body and spirit can try one of the scenic paths that lead to the peaks of the Sabotin and Škabrijel, certainly famous due to the First World War, but also for the extraordinary beauty of their landscapes. Bike lovers will enjoy the spectacular cycle path beginning at the location of the suspended bridge, which reaches the villages of the middle and high course of the Soča, one of Europe's most charming rivers known for its colours and surroundings. In the same area, those in search of adrenaline-based experiences can leap off the bridge across the river tied to a bungee cord, enjoy the panoramic zip line or engage in the breathtaking thrills of the various experiences offered by Soča Fun Park.

In short, there's something for everyone – and even more. It's possible to plan an entire network of routes that will remain valid for months or even years to come given that Aquileia is a crossroads of several different pilgrimage routes that often intersect.

There's the *Cammino Celeste* (Heavenly Way), a 10-day walk that leads to the magnificent Mount Lussari, about 1,800 metres above sea level, offering a panoramic view of the wonderful peaks of the Julian Alps.

This route can also be reached from Sveta Gora by following another fascinating path known as *The Way of the Three Sanctuaries*, which connects the end point of the Way of Gorizia with the Sanctuary of Castelmonte above Cividale.

The Aquileia countryside



From Muggia to Aquileia, skirting the sea – always visible from the Karst ridge – runs the *Via Flavia*, which provides long views.

Aquileia, an ancient Roman and Early Christian city, is also crossed by several routes recognised by the European Union: two itineraries dedicated to Saint Martin of Tours, the *Romea Strata* from the Baltic countries to Rome, and the *Way of Saints Cyril and Methodius*, from Velehrad in the Czech Republic down to Rome.

In brief, you can start off with the four 'Goritian' stages and then become inspired to explore other paths, discovering the network of connections embedded in these lands since ancient times.

This guide was written with special attention paid to those who, for various reasons, may not be able to walk, or to dedicate much time to such a journey. Simply by reading, any individual can at least follow the route in spirit, exploring the insights that give context to each phase of the itinerary, and developing an initial understanding of a land that is truly unique.

In any case, since over the course of time all sorts of variations can occur along the route, it is always best to check the regularly updated website: www.itergoritiense.eu.

Preparing for the journey

The simple fact you are reading this guide means you've already taken the first step in preparing for the walk.

Logo of the European Capital of Culture 2025 in Nova Gorica



If you want to undertake a multi-day route, preparation is essential: what seems close by car can feel much farther on foot.

Since Iter Goritiense, or The Way of Gorizia, is a walking route, first of all it's important that you plan your trip to Aquileia and arrange how you will return from Sveta Gora as that area is not served by public transport.

The best option is to have someone pick you up; alternatively, you can walk downhill to Solkan and take a bus, train or other form of transport back to your starting point.

If you reached Aquileia by car, you can take a bus from Gorizia that will bring you back to the starting point. A regular bus service operates between Nova Gorica and Gorizia.

Learn about the route and accommodation

Researching the route and terrain is part of logistical preparation. Based on this information, you can decide the length of your journey, taking account of the time you have available, your age and physical condition. The itinerary can be completed in as little as 2 days, yet it can also extend beyond 5 days.

A common beginner's mistake is to plan the journey solely according to distance, without considering that a steep 5-km climb can be more demanding than a flat 20-km section. This means it is important to take elevation changes into account while planning your route.

Along the Way of Gorizia, the most challenging terrain is in the Karst region and the final ascent to Sveta Gora.

We recommend you identify places along the route where you can stop for food and water, as well as nearby shops, pharmacies, and medical services. Accommodation should be booked in advance.

Since pilgrim hospitality along the route is constantly evolving, this guide does not list specific accommodation possibilities. However, you can find updated information and contacts for each stage of your walk on the route's official website.

Check the weather forecast

A few days before departing, check the local weather conditions and forecasts for the area to ensure you pack appropriately. Of course, it's important to be ready for sudden weather changes – so bring clothing suitable for all kinds of conditions (heat, cold, wind, heavy rain), including waterproof gear.

In short: be prepared for anything.

Remember to stay hydrated

Especially in the warmer months, it's essential to carry enough water with you. This is particularly important on the flat section of the first stage and in the steeper second stage through the Karst where longer stretches cross remote, uninhabited areas.

Don't worry about bears!

It's highly unlikely you'll encounter large wild animals along the route. In the area of the Way of Gorizia, you might come across a few wild boars or deer. Reptiles – now increasingly rare in nature – tend to hide, especially if you use trekking poles, as they can sense the vibrations.

Download the GPX tracks

Before setting off, download the GPX tracks from the official website of the Way or from www.ediciclo.it, on the page dedicated to the book. This will allow you to walk with peace of mind, always knowing which path to take at every junction.

Follow the Knot

As you walk along the Way of Gorizia, keep an eye out for *Solomon's Knot*, our distinctive symbol, which will guide you along the entire route. This ancient emblem was chosen to mark the path, and you'll find it at various strategic spots – painted on stones and trees, or shown on stickers. Along the way, you may cross less visible paths, woods, and urban sections, but *Solomon's Knot* will be your constant point of reference, helping you stay on track and enjoy the beauty of this pilgrimage in full. Pay close attention to every sign and observe your surroundings carefully: while the symbol might appear discreetly, it will always be there to accompany you on your journey.

Get in shape

Good physical shape is essential if you want the 82 km of the Gorizia Way to be a pleasant experience rather than an ordeal. Even if you are already fit, it's wise to prepare specifically for walking by doing some training in the days before you start. If you already go hiking regularly, try increasing the distance you travel and the duration. If physical activity hasn't been part of your routine until now but you wish to make a change and start with the Way of Gorizia, begin preparing well in advance – don't wait until the last few days before departing.

During your training walks, carry a backpack and gradually add weight each day to help your body adjust. As a general rule, your backpack should weigh about 10% of your body weight on long-distance walks and only contain the essentials. Remember: every extra gram makes a difference.

Choose the right season

The Gorizia Way boasts an exceptionally mild and favourable climate, making it accessible all year-round – even in winter, unlike many other long-distance routes.

This means that between December and March the journey may actually be easier than, say, in mid-August.

On the flat sections of the first stage and the second stage across the Karst, summer temperatures can become quite high. It is therefore advised to start early in the morning, rest during the hottest hours of the day, and continue once it cools down. Summer days are long, so you'll be able to finish your stage well before sunset without difficulty.

The Solomon's Knot symbol of the way





Pilgrim's passport and stamp

The Credential and the Testimonium

You can collect your pilgrim credential at the bookshop of the Basilica of Aquileia.

This official document will accompany you throughout the journey, allowing you to collect stamps along the way as signs of your pilgrimage.

The shop, located in Piazza Capitolo next to the basilica, has staff who will be happy to provide both the credential and all the information you need for your trip.

Be sure to carry it with you in all of the stages – it will testify to your effort and allow you to receive the

Testimonium after you have reached your destination.

The Testimonium is the document every pilgrim receives at the end of the journey – a tangible memory of your path through the spiritual, historical and cultural landscapes of the region of Gorizia.

It celebrates the pilgrim's commitment, courage and determination to embrace the journey as an experience of personal growth and connection with this land's deepest roots of spirituality and culture.

To receive the Testimonium of the Way of Gorizia in digital format, you must make a request by email at info@itergoritiense.eu



THE ROUTE



From Aquileia to Sagrado

km 28 - h. 7:00 - Difficulty: Moderate

Municipalities crossed:

Aquileia, Fiumicello Villa Vicentina, Pieris, San Canzian d'Isonzo, Turriaco, San Pier d'Isonzo, Fogliano Redipuglia, Sagrado

All of these towns are served by regional bus lines. Sagrado also has a railway station

Altitude difference: +89 m / -69 m

Maximum altitude: 25 m a.s.l.

Minimum altitude: -2 m a.s.l.

Terrain: 40% paved, 60% dirt or gravel

Points warranting caution: Be careful while crossing the bridge over the Isonzo River at Pieris and when crossing the main state road at San Canzian d'Isonzo.

Leaving **Aquileia (1)**, you initially walk along the Via Sacra, which runs beside the Natissa – today little more than a clear stream, but once a broad river that allowed medium-sized ships to reach the heart of the great city.

You can admire the foundations of the ancient harbour, built in several stages between the 1st century BC and the 5th century AD, and on both sides of the road you'll see Roman remains brought to light during excavations in the 1930s.

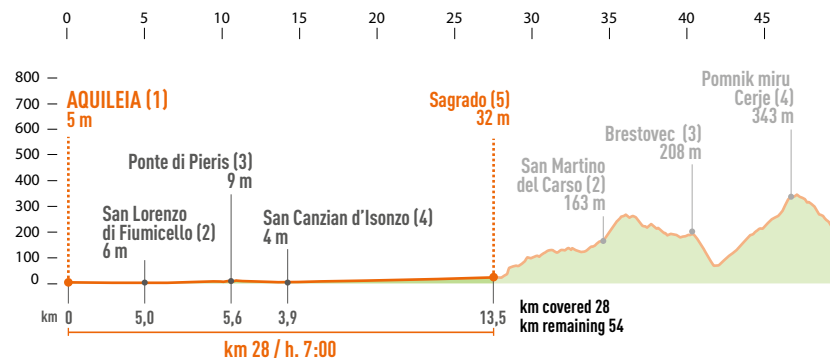
AQUILEIA

Colonised by the Romans beginning in 181 BC, Aquileia has a long and important history, and it's worth dedicating a full day to exploring it before setting out on your journey early the next morning.

You can visit the fascinating archaeological zones, especially the port canal – the northernmost in the whole Mediterranean.

Thanks to commercial exchanges, the roads extending deep into Europe, and the passage of armies and missionaries, Aquileia became a strategic hub of the highest order. It was the ninth-largest city in the Roman Empire, and the fourth in the Italian territories.

You can sense this extraordinary wealth by visiting the *decumanus* of Artria Galla, the excavated remains of homes, baths, markets, sanctuaries, the well-preserved house of Titus Macro, and the *domus episcopalis* with its stunning mosaics. Two excellent museums – the Archaeological Museum and the Early Christian Museum – are also well worth a longer visit.



The basilica is a treasure chest of art, history and culture, with its mosaics in the two small halls from the early 4th century, created soon after Constantine's Edict of Religious Tolerance in 313 AD, in Milan. As a complete system of Christian worship spaces – a catechumen hall, baptistry, and Eucharistic hall – it is among the earliest of its kind in the world.

Rebuilt several times over the centuries, layer upon layer, in the Middle Ages it became the central church of an immense Patriarchate whose influence extended from Hungary to Lombardy. The Romanesque basilica commissioned by Patriarch Poppon, consecrated on 13 July 1031, still bears

The Patriarchal Basilica of Aquileia

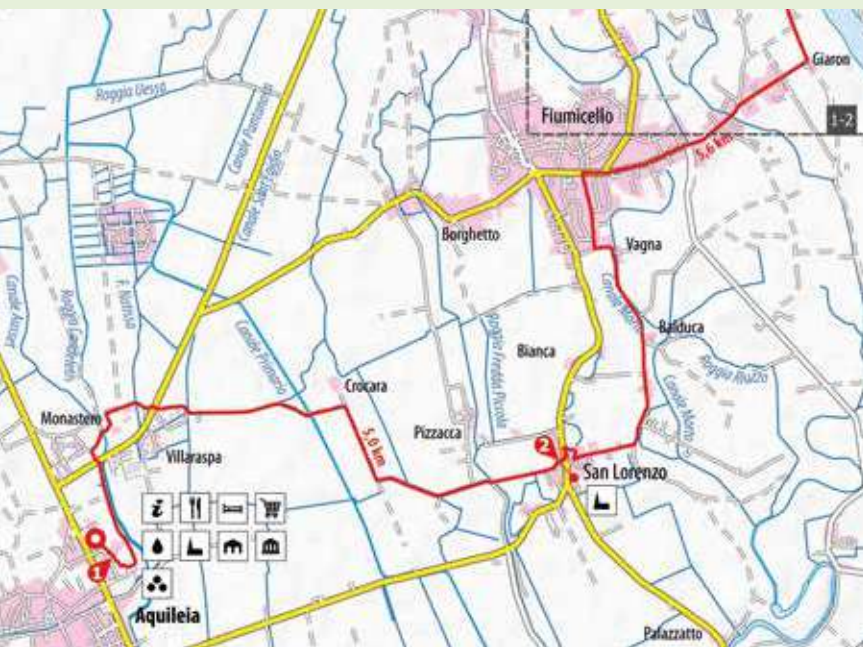


witness to this era. *The Crypt of the Frescoes* preserves splendid 12th-century paintings, while the nave's main vault was rebuilt in Gothic style after having collapsed in the great earthquake of 1348. The Renaissance added its elegant marble pulpits, and the early 20th century, commencing in 1909, saw the rediscovery of Bishop Theodore's original mosaics.

The large baptistery in front of the basilica dates, at least in part, to the time of Bishop Chromatius, with two small halls – north and south (only the southern one is open to visitors) – used for the preparation of catechumens. Later modifications from subsequent centuries are still visible.

Behind the basilica's apse lies a touching war cemetery, where around 200 Italian soldiers wounded on the Karst front and who died in nearby hospitals during the First World War are buried. A monument to Unknown Soldiers honours 10 of them, and in front of it lies Maria Bergamas – a mother who on 28 October 1921 in the Basilica of Aquileia chose the coffin of the unknown soldier that was then taken to Rome and buried at Altare della Patria.

At the basilica's bookshop in Piazza Capitolo, you can obtain your pilgrim credential to collect stamps along stages of the route.



Cross the regional road carefully and enter the small village of Monastero – its name recalling the Benedictine nuns who preserved the site's spirituality for over 1,000 years. Following the monastery's suppression under Emperor Joseph II, the large building in the village square underwent various changes before becoming, under state ownership, the Early Christian Museum, which houses fascinating stone and mosaic artefacts from the first centuries of Christianity.

Skirting the large Villa Ritter Zahonj, cross the regional road again and take a pleasant country lane, paved at first, before it becomes gravel. You walk through the bright Friulian countryside, gradually leaving Aquileia behind, with the city's mighty 11th-century bell tower – almost 80 metres tall and visible from right across Friuli – dominating the horizon. After about 5 km, you reach the hamlet of **San Lorenzo**, part of the municipality of **Fiumicello (2)**.

SAN LORENZO DI FIUMICELLO

Built between the 15th and 16th centuries, this church is a place of deep spirituality, housing fine works of art, especially marble groups depicting Christ and the saints. The bell tower rises above the entrance, seemingly supported by the columns of the porch. The surrounding lawn is a welcoming spot for rest and reflection before resuming your walk.

The Church of San Lorenzo in Fiumicello





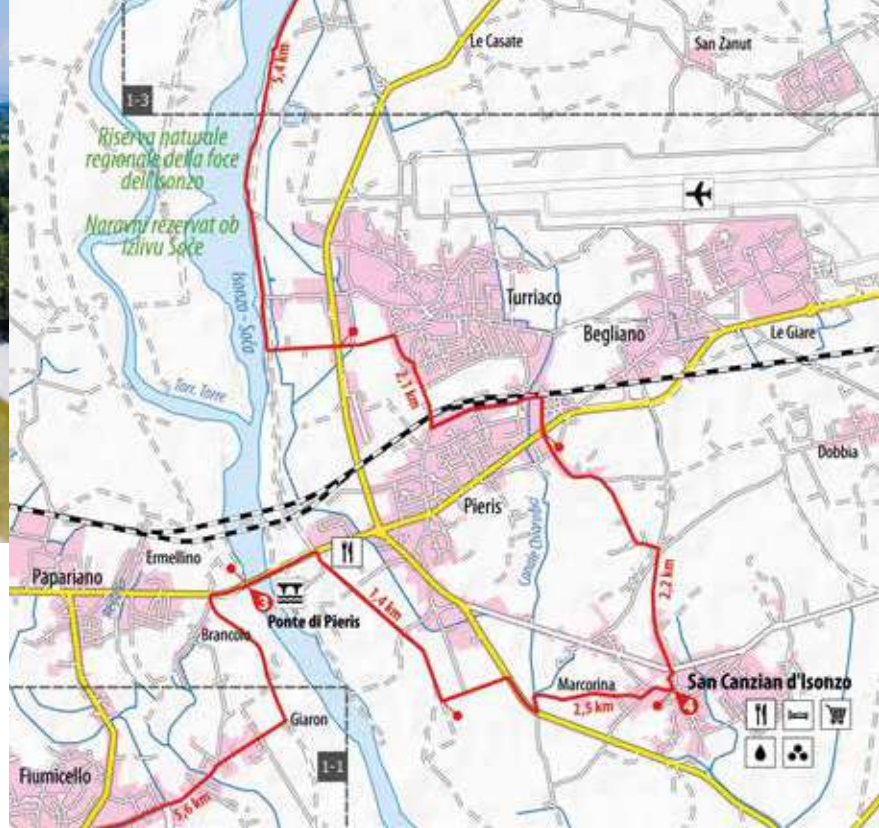
The river Isonzo - Soča in Pieris

Take the quiet paved road that curves around the right side of the church (as you face it). Follow the signs carefully, staying on the lane that runs parallel to the main road, passing through several peaceful rural hamlets. You'll walk behind the rear of the Fiumicello cemetery, where you may pause for a moment at the grave of Giulio Regeni, a young researcher brutally murdered in Egypt in 2016, for whom people across the world continue to call for the truth and justice.

Continue north-east along long cement sidewalks, gradually approaching the imposing embankment of the Isonzo River (follow the signs for "Ristorante All'Argine"). Once you reach it, follow the riverbank for about 1 km on a rough track until you come to the busy Venice-Trieste state road. Keeping to the right and walking carefully along the shoulder, you'll soon reach the **Ponte di Pieris (3)** – (Pieris bridge), which includes a safe pedestrian lane.

THE ISONZO - SOČA

The Isonzo River rises in Slovenia from a karstic cave at the foot of Mount Mojstrovka, near the Triglav National Park. The upper part of its course runs through the stunning Trenta valley.



In Slovenia – where the river is called by its feminine name, Soča – it flows through Bovec, Kobarid (site of the famous Battle of Caporetto), Tolmin, Most na Soči, Kanal ob Soči, Solkan, and Nova Gorica. After crossing the border, the Isonzo skirts Gorizia, then passes Sovodnje ob Soči, Gradisca d'Isonzo, Turriaco, Villesse, San Pier d'Isonzo, Ruda, Pieris, Staranzano, and Fiumicello before reaching the sea after 136 km, in the protected wildlife reserve of the Isola della Cona. Its main tributaries are the Koritnica, Tolminka, Idrijca, Vipava, and Torre. The river is renowned for the beauty of the landscapes it crosses, the importance of the historical events along its banks, and the extraordinary emerald colour of its waters.



Path along the Isonzo embankment towards Fogliano

After crossing the long bridge, you arrive at a large parking area with a small shop where you can rest and refresh yourself. The route continues to the right, heading south along quiet country roads – paved but with little to no traffic. Take care not to miss the sign at kilometre 12 indicating a sharp left turn. A short straight stretch

leads to the busy Provincial Road 20, which must be crossed carefully. You then arrive at a pleasant pedestrian and cycle path that, after about 2 km, brings you from the hamlet of Marcorina to the centre of **San Canzian d'Isonzo (4)**. Up to this point, you will have walked 14.5 km from Aquileia.

SAN CANZIAN D'ISONZO

After Aquileia, this is the second-most important archaeological site in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

At the town's entrance stands a small chapel dedicated to Saint Proto, within which mosaics from a 5th-century church have been found. A little further on is the garden of the welcoming rectory, which can host up to 14 pilgrims (and more if tents are pitched in the adjoining field).

To the right, you'll glimpse the mysterious round Church of the Holy Spirit, while the route invites you left toward the Parish Church of Saints Cantius,

Cantianus, and Cantianilla. Outside, rows of ancient tombstones and sarcophagi attest to the area's long history.

The 18th-century church stands on the foundations of a monastery, itself built on top of an Early Christian basilica. Informative panels help you trace the site's architectural evolution and identify the exact tomb of Saints Cantius, Cantianus, and Cantianilla.

Their story, as told by the poet Venantius Fortunatus, recalls the heroic martyrdom of three young siblings who came from Rome to meet their tutor Proto. Guided from Aquileia to a place called *ad aquas gradatas* (loosely, "at the stepped waters", i.e., springs), they were captured after learning of Proto's death and executed during Emperor Diocletian's last great persecution of Christians around 303–304 AD. After their death, they were buried with all honours by the faithful of the time.

In 1960, archaeological excavations led by Mario Mirabella Roberti and Sergio Tavano uncovered relics believed to belong to the three siblings – scientifically confirming what had long been considered a pious medieval legend. These relics are now preserved and venerated beneath the main altar of the parish church.

Church of Saints Canziani



Leaving San Canzian d'Isonzo requires careful attention since the route weaves through a tangle of roads best navigated by following the waymarks and Solomon's Knot symbols.

Heading north, you soon reach the town of Turriaco. Continuing onward, you cross the outskirts of Pieris, then turn decisively to the west. After crossing the Fogliano-Pieris regional road, you once again reach the left bank of the Isonzo. Climb the embankment (carrying your bike if necessary) along the cleared trail, and on the other side you'll find a dirt farm track.

From here on, for several kilometres, you will walk through the beautiful Regional Nature Reserve of the Isonzo River Mouth, rich in vegetation, birds, and countless insects, and always accompanied by the soft, steady murmur of the river as it flows calmly towards the sea. A children's playground nestled in a small wood provides a welcome resting spot for weary summer travellers. After the park – created by the Municipality of Turriaco – you continue among fields and thickets on paths that vary from smooth to overgrown, but are always identifiable.

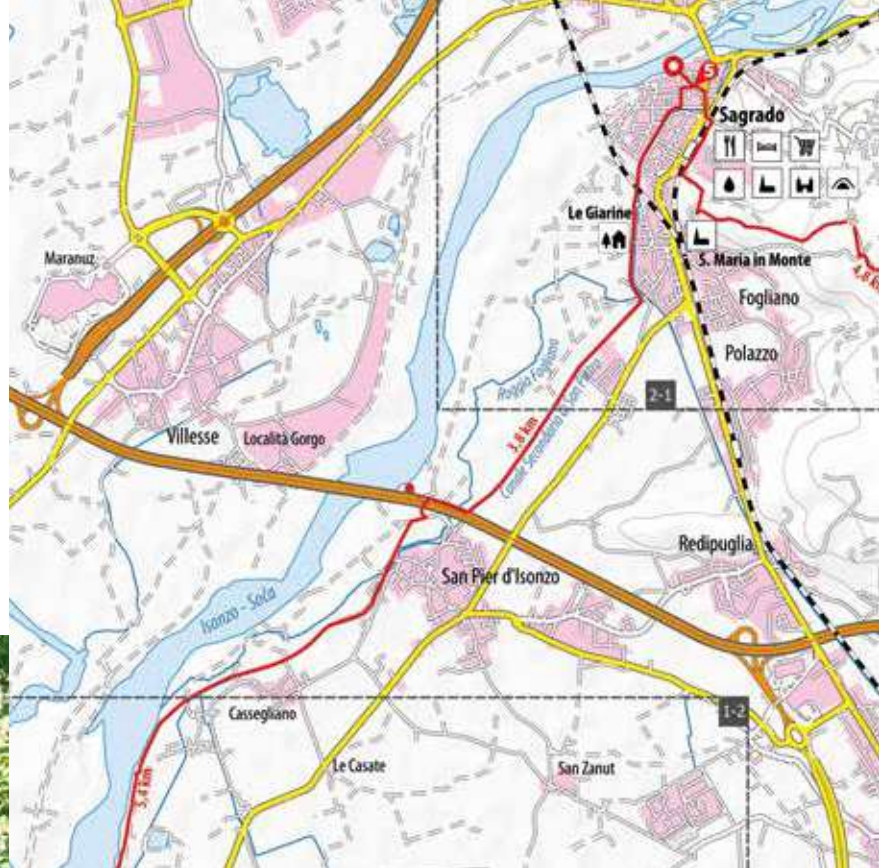
In the midst of brambles stands a small Marian shrine, while in the distance

you can see the first gentle rises of the Karst Plateau. The area is fairly developed – power lines are visible everywhere, running from the large Fogliano power station nearby.

Following various twists and turns, alternating between sunny and shaded stretches, and always following the waymarks, you reach Casseghiano and the outskirts of San Pier d'Isonzo. A tunnel takes you safely underneath the A4 Trieste-Venice motorway. Skirting its edges, you follow a long unpaved road (first Via Battisti, then Via dei Bersaglieri) leading to the centre of Fogliano. Passing the wide grounds of the *Le Giarine* farmhouse on the left, you continue away from major roads until you



Marian shrine in the woods



reach the Agro Monfalconese Canal, dug in the early 20th century to irrigate farmland on the edge of the Karst. The water here is lively and cool, passing over small weirs that make its current flow faster. After about 2 km, you arrive in

Sagrado (5), specifically at the parish house – an important rest stop along the route and the end of the first stage of the journey, dedicated to the 'roots' of this land. Since leaving, you will have covered approximately 29 km.

SAGRADO

The town's name comes from Slovenian and literally means "near the castle". Indeed, overlooking the Isonzo stands the ancient Alimonda Castle that has been restored on multiple occasions.

Here, one can truly sense the mingling of languages and cultures: Italian, Slovenian, and Friulian are all spoken, together with *bisiaco*, a special dialect shared by people living between the Timavo and Isonzo rivers.

The parish church is dedicated to Saint Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra. This place may be seen as a true gateway to the Karst region, characterised by its caves and sinkholes. In one of these caves, a few years ago a proteus was found – a strange amphibian that lives for decades in total darkness, with its skin being pale and almost human in colour. In Slovenian, it is called *človeška ribica*, meaning "human fish".

Just above the town lies a beautiful historical and nature trail dedicated to Giuseppe Ungaretti, evoking memories of the First World War and featuring panels with some of his most moving poems.

The canal of the Monfalcone countryside in Sagrado



From Sagrado to Mirenski Grad

km 24 - h. 6:00 - Difficulty: Medium

STAGE TWO:

WOUNDS

2

Municipalities crossed:

Municipality of Sagrado, Municipality of San Martino del Carso, Municipality of Savogna d'Isonzo, Municipality of Miren-Kostanjevica.

Altitude difference: +665 m / -596 m

Maximum altitude: 346 m a.s.l.

Minimum altitude: 22 m a.s.l.

Terrain: 15% asphalt, 85% dirt roads and trails

Critical points: Take great care while crossing *Strada Statale del Vallone* after you descend Mount Brestovec.

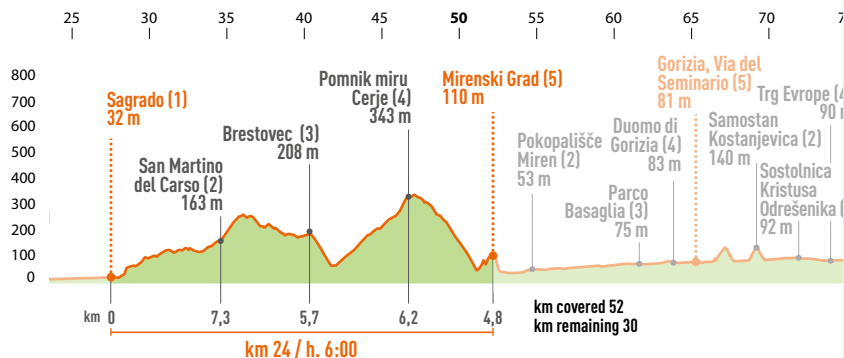
Leaving the welcoming rectory of **Sagrado (1)**, head toward the train station. Before you reach it, walk through the village on the sidewalks along the Udine-Trieste highway, then turn onto the road that climbs the hill, passing beneath the rail-

way line. Immediately after the underpass, turn right and continue for nearly 1 km alongside the tracks before starting to climb into the woods along a beautiful, wide trail.

At a crossing, leave the main path briefly to follow the sign for the

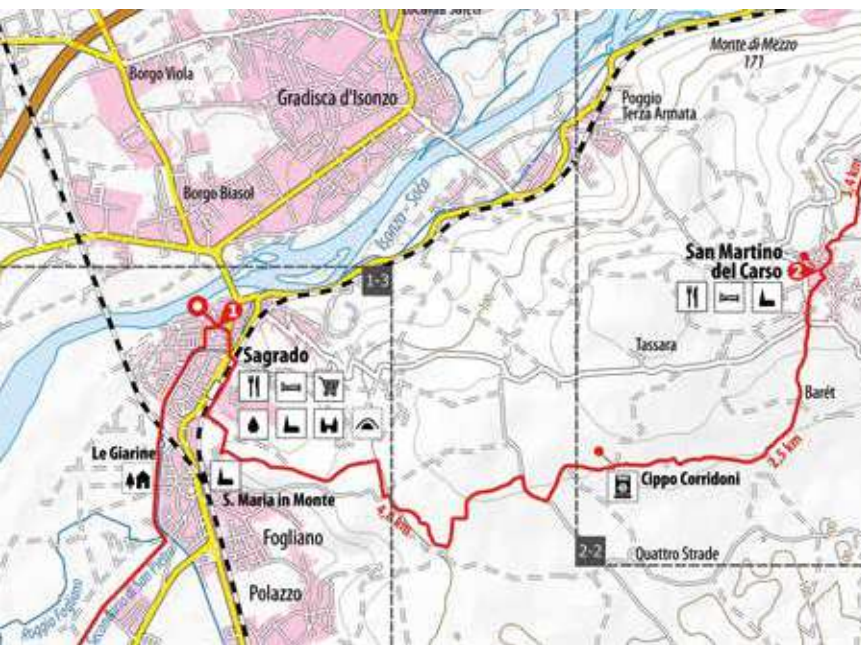
The Church of Santa Maria in Monte





Church of Santa Maria in Monte, which is reached with a narrow, yet clearly visible footpath. This small sanctuary deserves a pause – and, if possible, a visit – due to it being decorated with some of the finest

16th-century frescoes in the Province of Gorizia. Refreshed by this pleasant and instructive stop, continue on your way to the long crossing of the Karst Plateau.



THE KARST

The *Carso* (Karst) is a plateau marked by geological features that are so distinctive they provide the origin of the very word karstic that is used around the world to describe similar landscapes. Part of it lies in Italy, separated from the Slovenian portion by a broad valley – which was perhaps once the ancient bed of the Isonzo River.

The terrain is generally devoid of surface water, except for ponds used to irrigate fields or water livestock. Nevertheless, the work of water can be seen everywhere: in the striated rocks, in the many depressions called *dolines*, and especially in the countless caves – some being arranged for visitors, such as the Grotta Gigante near Trieste, the marvellous Škocjan Caves, and the famous Postojna Cave in Slovenia.

The Karst is dotted with charming villages that cling to its hillsides, their stone houses built to withstand the bora, namely, the fierce, icy wind that most often blows in the winter, shaping both the bodies and temperament of its inhabitants. Many churches stand here too, distinguished by their unusual bell towers built directly above the entrance.

Numerous artists were born or raised on the plateau and inspired by it in their work. Among Italian writers, one recalls Scipio Slataper, Umberto Saba, Fulvio Tomizza, and Claudio Magris; among Slovenians, poets such as Srečko Kosovel from Tomaj, Ciril Zlobec from Ponivke, and Igo Gruden from Aurisina are well known across Europe. Many churches feature frescoes by the great painter Tone Kralj, and the region gave birth to artists like Zoran Mušič, Lojze Spagal, and the architect Maks Fabiani. The Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti also composed some of his most moving verses here.

Pilgrims on the Karst



Still, the Karst is equally known for having been one of the main front lines in the First World War. Until 1915, the area was under Austro-Hungarian rule, and local youths had been conscripted into the imperial army following the outbreak of the war in 1914. When Italy entered the conflict on 24 May 1915, its troops quickly advanced to the foot of the plateau.

What followed was a long trench war lasting until August 1916 when, after Italy's brief conquest of Gorizia, the front shifted a few kilometres eastward to the Fajtji Hrib area, cutting across the Vipava Valley and involving the mountains above Gorizia: Mount Sabotin and Sveta Gora fell to the Italians, whereas Mount Škabriel remained in imperial hands.

After the Caporetto disaster in October 1917, the entire area reverted to Austria, only to return to Italy after 4 November 1918. This constant back-and-forth took an enormous toll – which Pope Benedict XV called in 1917 “the horrendous slaughter” – costing hundreds of thousands of lives: wiping out an entire generation.

The Karst is dotted with small Austro-Hungarian cemeteries in their memory, while the remains of Italian soldiers were gathered in monumental ossuaries: Redipuglia (around 100,000 dead), Oslavia (60,000), and Caporetto/Kobarid (over 7,000, most being unidentified).

The nationalist policies of Italy – especially of Fascism between the wars – devastated the once-peaceful coexistence among the region's various cultures, forcing an artificial homogenisation that bred racism, violence and hatred, sowing the seeds for the poisonous harvest of the Second World War, with all its consequences.

The Corridoni Memorial Stone



Pay careful attention since you will be entering a thick net of little roads and paths: never lose sight of the trail sign, and keep following the directions for the village of San

Martino del Carso and for the peak of Mount San Michele. The overall altitude difference is no more than 200 m, but make sure you move with attention and moderation.

TRACES OF MEMORY

You are now walking along trails winding through groves of smoketree, whose round leaves turn a vivid red in October – a fiery blaze of beauty that moves and comforts the heart. You step across ditches that at one time were trenches, amazed by how close the Italian and Austrian lines ran – sometimes less than 100 metres apart.

How many lives were cut short in those few useless charges, those assaults stopped by each side's machine guns! Everywhere, you find stone markers commemorating the 'sacrifice' of a squad, a battalion, or a single soldier who fell while trying to storm the 'enemy lines'.

Eventually, you come to a huge monument, at least 6 metres tall, with bas-reliefs in unmistakable Fascist style. This is the Corridoni Monument, erected in memory of Filippo Corridoni (1887 – October 1915), a well-known and controversial figure – a revolutionary socialist and anti-imperialist trade unionist who, by 1915, had become an ardent interventionist in favour of Italy entering the war.

His memory was later claimed by both postwar socialism and communism, and by Benito Mussolini, who had shared his interventionist activism. The tall, massive column stands on the very spot where Corridoni was killed during the brief conquest of the *Trincea delle Franche* ("Trench of the Branches"), lost again the following day in an Austro-Hungarian counter attack. Like so many memorials from that time, this too belongs to the construction of myth – perhaps far beyond what the fallen soldier himself would have desired or believed.

After another pleasant half hour of walking along dirt roads and past dry-stone walls separating small plots of land, you reach **San Martino del Carso (2)**. You are greeted on the right by a large shed in a mead-

ow – a significant private museum of the First World War, offering insights into the key themes of trench warfare that dominated this area for nearly 1.5 years.

A few metres further on, a white Karst stone displays the words of one of Giuseppe Ungaretti's most famous poems:

*Of these houses / nothing / but
fragments of memory /
Of all / who would talk with me not
/ one remains /
But in my heart / no one's cross is
missing /
My heart is / the most tormented
country of all.*

Even aided by old photographs, one can only imagine the total destruction and sense of death and desolation that marked this entire region during the Great War.

Walk through the village, past the rebuilt parish church dedicated, of course, to Saint Martin, whose image is depicted above the portal, and continue almost to the cemetery. About 50 metres after a bend, take the clearly visible path on the left that leads into the bushes. The trail climbs through woodland to a pleasant clearing with memorial stones, descriptive panels, and benches – making an ideal place for group reflection or discussion. Walking 10 more minutes brings you to the monumental area of Mount San Michele, actually a long ridge whose highest point is 276 m a.s.l.

There are four main summits, the second being the most imposing. To the left, a broad terrace opens to an exceptional panorama across

the Friulian plain, the Pre-Alps, and the Julian Alps. Here stands a war museum at which visitors can experience virtual reality recreations of the conflict's most intense moments.

Nearby are the remains of gun emplacements from which enormous firepower was unleashed upon Austrian positions – themselves defended with bloody counter attacks. The barren landscape evokes an eerie sense of death that, especially in good weather, contrasts sharply with the lush surrounding vegetation and the beauty of the region. It's worth visiting several of the wartime remains scattered throughout – particularly numerous and striking in this section of



Giuseppe Ungaretti's poem in San Martino del Carso



the route. Continue along the comfortable path following the ridge until the main trail turns sharply to the left; here, take the easily identifiable track that descends steeply eastwards.

After about half an hour, you enter the picturesque village of San Michele del Carso (Vrh in Slovenian), just before the famous Devetak Inn, where it is not only possible but highly recommended to pause and enjoy the culinary and wine treasures of the region – welcome comfort after so much solemn reflection.

Continue through the village, past and around the Church of Saint

Michael. Be careful not to take the paved road on the left (which leads to Savogna d'Isonzo and Gorizia), but instead descend in the opposite direction along the asphalt road that drops steeply toward the houses of *Casali Neri*. After about 200 metres from the junction next to the church, leave the road and turn left onto a well-marked forest trail. From here, follow the many signs for Mount Brestovec, which can be reached either by passing near the *Grotta a Due Piani* ("Two-Level Cave") or directly, in about another half hour's walk.

At **Brestovec (3)**, the traces of war are immediately visible – especially

the recently restored Austro-Hungarian shelters. There are explanatory panels and even cardboard figures in the galleries, meant to evoke the harsh lives of soldiers forced to remain in these recesses for months on end, always fearful of being ordered to attack. As a monument atop Mount San Michele proclaims, *Austrians, Italians, Hungarians found brotherhood in death*. One must also remember those who refused to leave their trenches because they would not kill young men who, as the singer Fabrizio De André wrote, “they had the same mood, but a uniform of a different colour”.

Not far from Brestovec lies Doberdò del Lago (Doberdob in Slovenian), vividly described by the writer Prežihov Voranc in his novel *Doberdob*. A well-known song calls it “*Doberdob, the grave of Slovenian boys*”. A moving monument in the local cemetery – the work of sculptor Jože Cej – honours these fallen soldiers of the Isonzo Front. It was solemnly inaugurated in 2016 in the presence of the Presidents of Slovenia and Italy, Borut Pahor and Sergio Mattarella.

From the summit of Brestovec, descend quickly along a comfortable trail through sun-scorched slopes where vegetation, destroyed by the great wildfires of summer 2022, is slowly return-

ing. You reach the busy Gorizia-Trieste highway, running through *Vallone*, a deep cut between the Brestovec and Trstelj hills – perhaps the ancient course of the Isonzo in prehistoric times.

Cross the road carefully and take the dirt track climbing the opposite hillside. After a long but gentle ascent through shrubs and trees, you reach the border, entering Slovenia. The Karst crossing from Sagrado to the border covers 15 km – you are now at kilometre 44 since leaving Aquileia.

The national border, on this gently rising path, is barely perceptible, no

longer marked as it once was. The warning signs are gone, and only a small stone post, partly hidden by vegetation, remains. This absence gives the traveller a sense of freedom and ease of movement – and the symbolic connection between two countries, two cultures, two peoples whose histories, both happy and tragic, are deeply present in the significance of this Way of Gorizia.

We leave Italy where the narrow Abram Schmid Trail, coming from the left, joins the broader track. This path runs along what was once the border line between the two

states, patrolled for many years after the Second World War by border guards along what was then an impassable divide.

Continue along the trail, turning right and then left, to reach the Miren-Opatje Selo regional road. Cross it carefully and you'll find a large gravel parking area – one of the main starting points for the walk to the top of Veliki Cerje (343 m), crowned by the Monument to Peace, standing 25 metres high. From the parking area, follow the paved road ascending toward Cerje, about 2 km away.

The trail on Mount Brestovec



A cross on Peak 3 of Mount San Michele

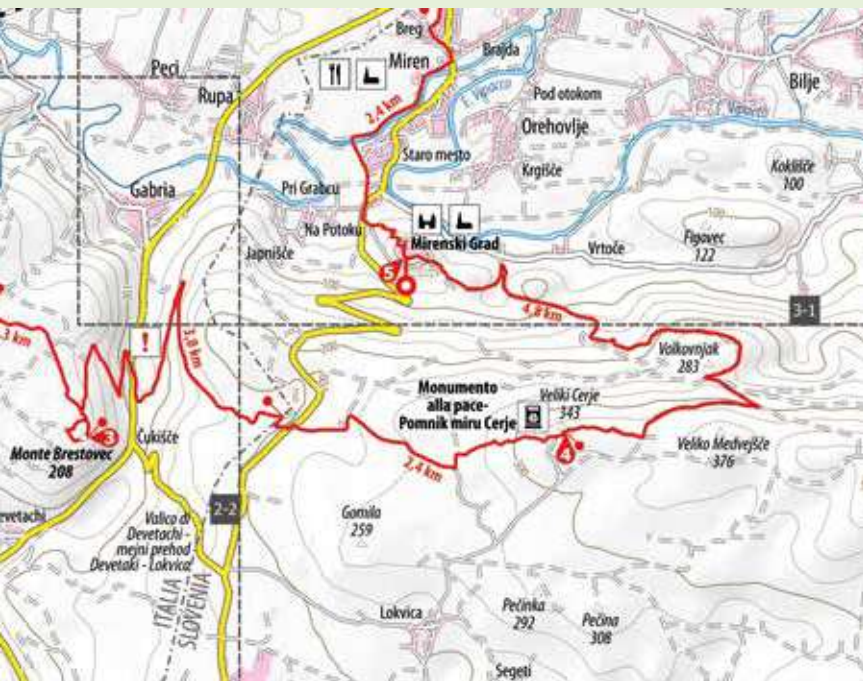
THE FIRE OF 2022

The largest forest fire in the history of independent Slovenia raged through the Gorizia Karst region in the summer of 2022, affecting about 3,700 hectares of land on the Slovenian side of the border alone, consuming trees, shrubs, and all other forms of vegetation in the area. Immediately following the fire, both sides of the road were bare and devastated, and among the tree stumps, resembling corpses, and the burned stones, the once-hidden firing trenches and the large craters caused by artillery explosions during the First World War were clearly visible.

Fortunately, just a few days after the firefighters left the site, with the smell of smoke still in the air, the first small green plants began to sprout from the still-blackened ground. Each day, they grew more and more, as happens in every natural cycle of life, decay, death, rebirth, and new growth. Following this natural disaster, a large reforestation campaign was launched in the Cerje area under the guidance of the Slovenian Forestry Service, and many volunteers were called to participate, repeatedly visiting the burned area to plant thousands of saplings, with the aim to restore greenery to the Gorizia Karst as quickly as possible.



The Cerje Peace Monument



The route continues along the road until it reaches a wooden post on the left of the well-trodden path, inviting hikers to follow the Pot miru – Peace Trail, with the inscription “Cerje 0.8 km”. We continue walking through the typical karst landscape and soon turn right onto a wider path leading to the **Peace Monument (4)**. The trail is well-

marked and somewhat steep, but if the weather is clear it rewards walkers with a view of the sea and part of the Gulf of Trieste on one side, the Friulian plain on the other, and the captivating crown of the Julian Alps to the north. From the parking area near the Cerje tower, we have covered 2.2 km.

HOPES

The summit and the Monument to Peace, dedicated to the defenders of Slovenian soil

Above the entrance, the inscription reads: “To the Defenders of Slovenian Land”.

The Monument to Peace, built on the initiative of the TIGR Association (an acronym for Trieste, Istria, Gorizia and Rijeka), stands as a memorial to those who fought and died defending Slovenia’s western frontier. The seven-storey stone structure guides visitors through different eras of Slovenian history.

At the entrance, the ceremonial hall on the ground floor has a ceiling painted as a night sky, with stars positioned as they were above Slovenia on the eve of its independence: 25 June 1991. At its centre is a copy of the Freising Manuscripts, the oldest surviving text in Slovenian – and in any Slavic language – symbolising the nation's entry into history.

An adjacent room houses the painting *Dance of Life and Death* by academic artist Rudi Španzl. The basement contains the Tolmin Museum's exhibit *The People and the War*. The upper floors trace the path of the Slovenian nation from its 1848 revival to the 1991 War of Independence, with special focus given to the First World War and the Isonzo Front, which devastated the Cerje area. Temporary exhibitions by renowned artists are held here regularly, together with a short film offering a concise overview of the Great War and the fighting along the Isonzo, especially the Karst sector.

The monument's position is so strategic that it can be seen from far away. Those who make the ascent – preferably by foot or bicycle – can, even without climbing the tower, enjoy a 360-degree panoramic view of the Karst landscape, the Vipava Valley, the Trnovo Plateau, the Julian Alps and, on clear days, the Dolomites, the Collio hills, the Friuli plain, and the northern Adriatic Sea.

In autumn, the countryside around Cerje glows red with smoketree, and the area abounds in wartime relics linked by the Paths of Peace of the Karst. The tower also houses a tourist information centre, a shop selling souvenirs and local products, and a small café with a garden where visitors can refresh themselves while admiring one of the most beautiful panoramas in the region.

From Cerje, follow the red way-marks to the right toward Mount Trstelj, starting from the Monument to Peace car park. It is a splendid panoramic walk, with sea views to the west and the Vipava Valley and Alps to the east and north. Continue gently uphill along the well-trodden path until you reach a wooden post marking a barely visible junction. Follow the more cleared trail to a track, turn left, and continue along the arid Karst slope heading east. Soon you'll reach another fork of-

fering two options. For experienced hikers still feeling energetic, after about 20 km from Sagrado, descend left on a steep, rocky trail (unstable and slippery when wet). The short but demanding descent ends on a wide track – turn right, climb slightly (even though you'll see Mirenski Grad down to your left), then at the next junction turn left. For an easier route, or if you're feeling tired, we recommend a simpler although longer route: continue straight on the broader, well-marked path that

descends gradually to a dirt road. Turn left, following a forest track linking the Cerje car park with Mount Trstelj. After 500 metres, the two routes meet; turn right, then left at the next junction.

From here, the path follows the Volovnjak fire road, built after the great Karst fire to help contain or prevent future blazes – a symbol of new safety standards in forest management.

Near the plain, just before the paved Miren-Bilje road, turn left onto the path leading to Mirenski Grad. The trail climbs gently and, when you

come to a fork, take the upper track. Continue to the next junction and turn left onto a narrow yet comfortable footpath that meets the paved road leading up to Mirenski Grad. Cross it, then follow the stepped path through outdoor recreation areas, gardens, and cultivated plots – a testimony to the fertile land and the diligence of its caretakers. You soon reach the summit of **Mirenski Grad (5)**, crowned by the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows. From Sagrado to Mirenski Grad, we have covered about 24 km.

The Sanctuary of Mirenski Grad



MIRENSKI GRAD, THE CASTLE OF MIREN

Today, above all, a place for a retreat in solitude and silence

Just a few steps from the entrance to the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, the Castle of Miren offers kind hospitality and numerous interesting architectural and artistic works, as well as a pleasant panorama. It is not as breathtaking as the view from Cerje since Mirenski Grad, at 120 metres above sea level, is much lower, but in good weather you can enjoy a view north-west over the Friulian plain and the Dolomites, north to the Julian Alps, and east to the lower Vipava Valley. On clear, cloudless days, you can even see Triglav just beyond Sveta Gora.

The current Mirenski Grad complex, which stands on the site of a church that has existed at least since 1488, is a spiritual centre offering individuals and groups a place for a retreat in solitude and silence.

In addition to the Vincentian Fathers' Monastery, the House of the Sisters of Mercy, and the volunteers of the Vincentian Association of Charity, Miren Castle is home to the House of Spiritual Exercises and the House of Saint Mary, a family centre managed by the volunteer association VZD. Part of the complex is also used for programmes in support of the homeless.

The church that succeeded the original was built in 1866, but was completely destroyed in the First World War. It was then reconstructed, and once again severely damaged during the Second World War, before finally being restored to its present state after the conflict.

Built in a Neo-Romanesque style with the layout of a basilica, it is one of the largest churches in the Diocese of Koper/Capodistria. It is also noteworthy for the prominent artists who contributed to its decoration – among them the architects Ivan Vurnik and Boris Podrecca, the painter and sculptor Tone Kralj, and the designer Oskar Kogoj.

In the 18th century, the Way of the Cross leading up to Mirenski Grad was built, along with the Holy Staircase (modelled after the one in Rome) and the Calvary, later restored after it suffered damage during the two world wars.

From Mirenski Grad to Gorizia

km 13 - h. 4:00 - Difficulty: Easy

STAGE THREE:

REBIRTH

3

Municipalities crossed: Municipality of Miren-Kostanjevica, Municipality of Šempeter Vrtojba, Municipality of Gorizia. In Gorizia, there are both urban and interurban local public transport lines,

as well as a railway station.

Altitude difference: +86 m, -117 m

Maximum altitude: 110 m a.s.l.

Minimum altitude: 39 m a.s.l.

Terrain: 90% asphalt, 10% dirt road

At **Mirenski Grad (1)**, the route commences again from the church. At the beginning of the Scala Santa, cross the road, pass the playground on the left, and take the clearly marked pedestrian path descending into the valley. This was the final stretch of the pilgrimage route that ended at the 'sanctuaries' and the Calvary, although in the opposite direction. After a fairly steep drop of 400 metres, which gives the muscles a good work-out, when the

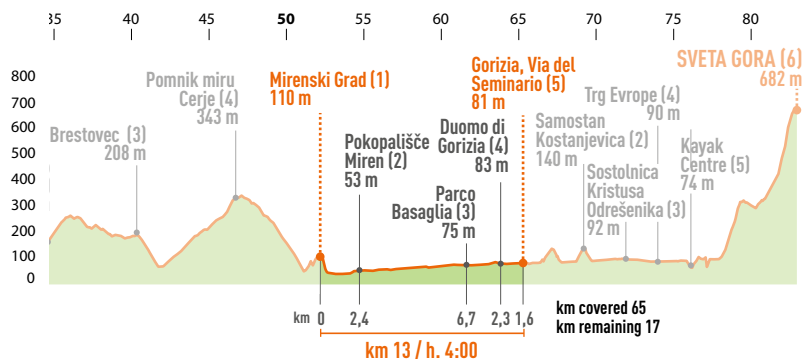
green football fields appear on the right, continue straight ahead on the narrow single-lane road at the curve. Shortly after you will reach the asphalt road, right at the first station of the Way of the Cross. Continue going down, and after about 100 metres of walking you will reach the main carriage road connecting Gorizia's Karst area and the Vipava Valley – to the left toward Opatje Selo, and to the right toward the centre of Miren.

MIREN

A place with a rich and turbulent history

If historical sources and modern digital records are accurate, then Miren, like other nearby places, was visited around the year 1500 by Leonardo da Vinci who, in order to defend Venice from the Turks, built several dams to flood the lower Vipava Valley. One of these dams is said to have been built in Miren. According to one theory, the name of the place – which means "peaceful" – comes from the calm flow of the Vipava River, which slows its course in wide meanders as if unwilling to cross the nearby national border and flow into the Isonzo – Soča in Italian territory.

In Roman times, the road from Aquileia to Emona passed through Miren.



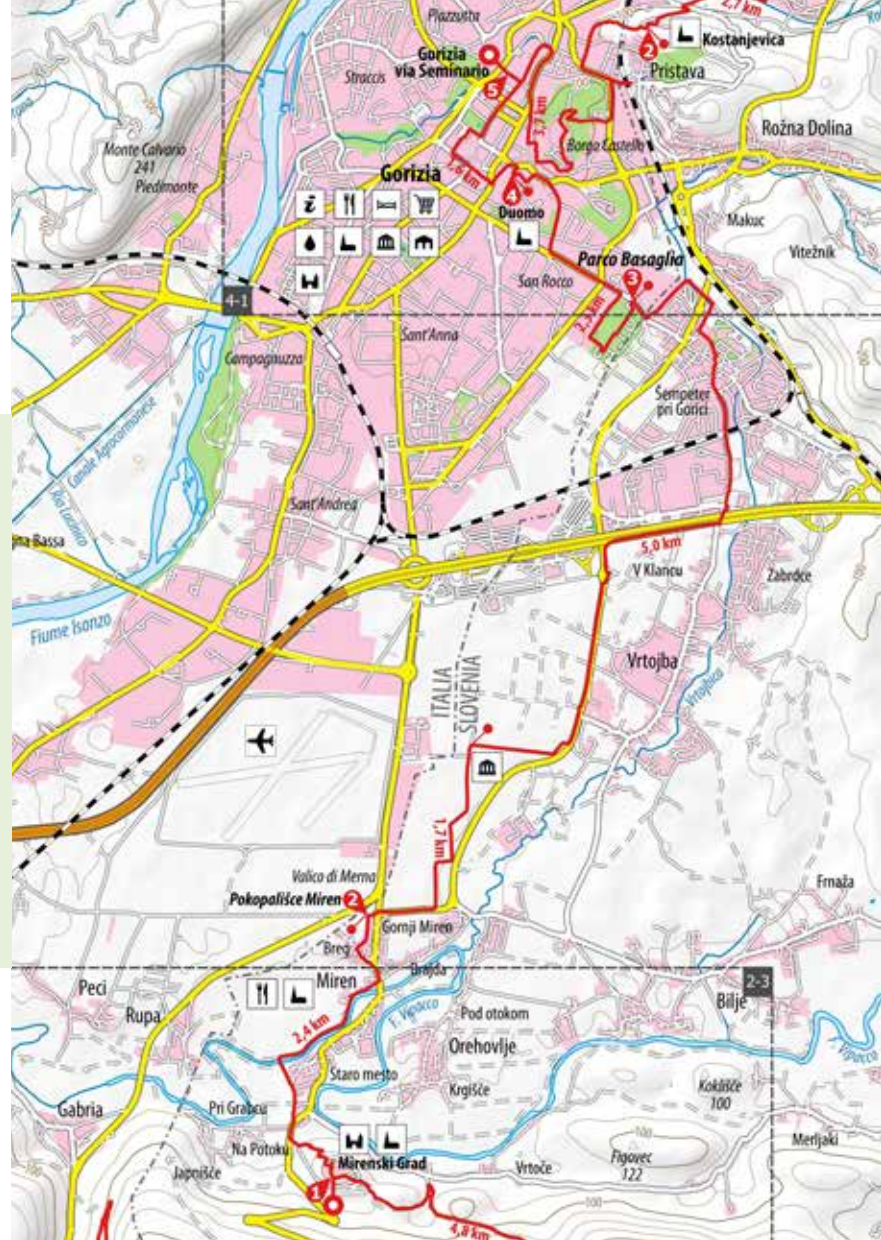
The tombs discovered in the hamlet of Japnišče testify to the earliest settlement of the area. They have been attributed to the Eastern Goths and are thought to date from the late 5th to mid-6th century.

In more recent history, the town became known for its leather working and shoemaking traditions. The brothers Edvard and Josip Rusjan, pioneers of Slovenian aviation, had their aeronautical workshop in Miren. Not far away, at Male Rojce, where the Gorizia airport stands today, on 25 November 1909 Edvard became the first Slovenian to fly, in an aircraft called *Eda I*. During the First World War, the proximity to the front line forced all of the inhabitants to evacuate, and most houses were destroyed or damaged. The town did not escape devastation in the Second World War either: the Germans lit two fires, and it was then further damaged by Allied bombing in March 1944, which accidentally also hit the nearby Roja airfield, destroying a factory. After the war, the town was deeply impacted by the redrawn borders following the Treaty of Paris.

In 1994, the Municipality of Miren-Kostanjevica was established, with its administrative seat in the town. In Miren, you can visit the gallery of the artist Oskar Kogoj and the Shoemaker's Museum.

Upon reaching the main road, turn right toward the town centre. Ignore the first turn on the left and take the second, just a few steps farther. On the western side opens a wide field, and the line of trees marking its edge indicates the riv-

er's proximity. Soon, you can leave the asphalt road, which on the level of a small chapel turns right and uphill. Continuing straight on the dirt path, you will see the narrow metal bridge over the Vipava River. After crossing it on a kind of



well-guarded walkway, turn right. Farther ahead, on one side there are fields and plantations, and on the other the river, partly concealed behind dense vegetation. You will soon reach an outdoor fitness area, a children's playground, and the new cycling bridge over the Vipava that was built in 2015.

If you cross the Vipava, you will arrive at the town hall. Art lovers can instead continue walking toward the town centre, soon reaching the Oskar Kogoj Gallery. Further on there is also a grocery store. If you are not interested in visiting the gallery or the store, you can continue along the river's left bank, passing the playground and entering among the houses.

After passing the pub, you reach the main road that runs through Miren.

Following it, in the area of the road bridge, our path turns left and, after just about 100 metres, brings us in front of the Church of St George. Across the road stands an old stone fountain, one of the many in the town, built in 1865. Its distinctive feature is the pavilion-style roof supported by iron pillars.

At the level of the church, you must turn left, passing in front of Villa Vuk and climbing toward the part of the town called Breg, whose centre is a small square with another stone fountain. Cross the square, then turn right between the more recent houses (a chain stretched between posts prevents cars from passing, but not bicycles or pedestrians). From here, you can already see the stone wall of the **Pokopališče Miren (2)** (Miren cemetery).

The former border line in the Miren cemetery



THE MIREN CEMETERY

The border was drawn right through the middle of the cemetery

After the Second World War, the cemetery of Miren had a unique characteristic: the border line was drawn right through it, leaving some of the graves on the Italian side and some on the Yugoslav side. This peculiarity is also presented in a small museum called *"Remember Me"*, housed in two rooms at the entrance to the cemetery.

The border, drawn quite irrationally by American soldiers after the Paris peace agreements, literally ran between the graves from 1947 to 1975. Thus, the cemetery of Miren became a symbol of an unbearable and senseless frontier – one that did not exist before. The border line was moved to the cemetery's edge only in 1974, and was officially ratified in 1975 with the *Osimo Agreement* when Italy and Yugoslavia defined their mutual relations and made life along the border easier.

The Miren cemetery has also become an important crossing point for more recent migrants because it provides easy access to what many dream of as a better world. Miren has been marked on maps and remembered in history as the place of greatest transit for those who have crossed the border between East and West – between communism and capitalism, between the poor world and the rich world.

The border was guarded by soldiers; locals often heard gunfire, and casualties were not uncommon. The museum is dedicated to all those who suffered due to the border: to those prevented from visiting their families' graves, to those for whom the crossing meant a journey into the unknown, and to those who lost hope, freedom, and even their lives while crossing or guarding the frontier.

The entrance to the cemetery is next to the roundabout. The road to Italy turns left, while the one leading to the centre of Miren turns right. We continue straight ahead, walking for a while on the side walk along the road, passing in front of the former military barracks, today the headquarters of the Police Dog Unit of Nova Gorica. Before the regional road begins to descend toward the new roundabout, turn left onto the paved pedestrian and

bicycle path. The countryside of Vrtojba is the name of this vast area of cultivated land, one of the most important agricultural zones in the Gorizia region.

After a few curves, you reach the former military watchtower where the Nova Gorica Museum has set up the smallest museum in Slovenia. It also houses an exhibition dedicated to the border that, in 1947, divided the Gorizia area into two parts. Until 1991, the 8-metre-tall tower



Former Yugoslav watchtower

was used by Yugoslav soldiers to observe the surroundings along the national border, which was strictly controlled during the Cold War.

After passing the tower and the surrounding rest area, turn right. A straight path leads to the overpass above the Vrtojba ring road, and just before the bridge, turn left. Continue alongside the ring road until you reach a large roundabout. Cross the road here, enter the pedestrian and bicycle path, and proceed along the embankment above which runs the highway that crosses the most important and busiest border crossing between Slovenia and Italy, near the settlement of Vrtojba. The highway runs to the left, and the fields and gardens lie to the right.

When you reach the local Šempeter–Vrtojba road, you must cross

it and follow the side walk. Pass under the highway and continue to the next roundabout. Go straight through the roundabout, leaving the shopping centre on your right, while on the left, across the road, stands the large Mahle complex, one of the major companies in the area of Gorizia. Mahle develops and produces modern mechatronic products and electrical and electronic equipment for motor vehicles. Even as the road crosses the railway tracks, continue straight ahead. Soon, the bell tower of St Peter's Church, the main church that gives its name to the town of Šempeter, comes into view, dominating Ivan Rob Square. Behind the bell tower, the turquoise façade of the Regional Hospital of Northern Primorska in Šempeter stands out clearly.

ŠEMPETER PRI GORICI

Once known for agriculture, and today for industry

Šempeter pri Gorici was long considered a rural suburb of Gorizia, but today it is an independent town and the seat of the Municipality of Šempeter–Vrtojba, one of the smallest in Slovenia. It was once a centre of significant agricultural activity, thanks to the excellent climatic conditions and very fertile soil well suited to cultivation, especially horticulture.

Due to its proximity to the national border, the town and municipality now have a highly developed economy. In the First World War, Šempeter lay on the front line and was completely razed to the ground. The Church of St Peter in the town centre, mentioned for the first time in written sources in the 13th century, was rebuilt after the war according to the designs of the architect Max Fabiani. Fabiani also renovated the town's most beautiful building, the Coronini Palace, built in the 17th century by the Counts Coronini-Cromberg, which was also almost completely destroyed during the war.

During the Second World War, it served as a military hospital. After the war, the palace was taken over by the Dr Franz Derganeč General Hospital, while today it belongs to the municipality, which has restored and furnished the building.

From Ivan Rob Square, continue past the church toward Coronini Palace. Before entering the courtyard, turn left, and at the next intersection, turn right to proceed toward the road leading to the hospital; cross it carefully and approach the Šempeter sports park. After crossing the small stream, turn onto the bike path, which runs under an overpass along the Vrtojba stream, heading toward Nova Gorica. At the first possible junction, turn left across a small bridge.

Continue along the perimeter wall of Gorizia's old Civil Hos-



The Church of Šempeter

pital, at the end of which you'll reach the border crossing with Italy. After passing the building that at one time housed the Italian border police, you'll

arrive in view of the Basaglia Park. From Mirenski Grad to the Šempeter border crossing, you will have covered 9 km.

GORIZIA AND NOVA GORIZIA, TWO CITIES IN ONE

And here we finally arrive at Gorizia, which in 2025, together with nearby Nova Gorica, was the first European Capital of Cross-Border Culture. It is a "city in two" to be discovered with care – not simply for its monuments, churches and squares, but above all for the powerful voice of its history. Every step along the city route – just over 10 km in total, on both sides of the old border – reveals the intertwining of cultures that has shaped the city. It stands as a living testament to how valuing diversity creates wonders of beauty, while imposing a single perspective brings discomfort, division and destruction.

It is a journey through highly complex events, sometimes glorious, sometimes painful. It is worth listening to the voices of the city's residents who, behind an apparent veneer of reserve, are in fact ready to share their stories and welcome every visitor warmly. In these streets, it becomes increasingly clear, step by step, how the historical roots of the territory – damaged in the first half of the 20th century – are returning to influence a region that is deeply united, yet marked by distinct linguistic, cultural and religious differences.

It is a land that, despite some lingering uncertainties, wishes to open itself to the fraternal embrace of the thousands of men and women who, after arduous journeys along the Balkan route, reach this border area hoping for a better life, far from war, persecution and hunger. If the programme for the future can only be to "tear down walls and build bridges", there is no better place than Basaglia Park to begin walking the streets of Gorizia.

Immediately after the old Šempeter pri Gorici border crossing, you re-enter Italy in an area that, until the late 1990s, was occupied by hospitals. The first building on the right, surrounded by a beautiful garden, served for many decades as a nursing school, while today it is a well-regarded first reception

centre for migrants. A little further ahead, the large structures of the former civil hospital and sanatorium are clearly visible; they are currently undergoing complete renovation, with their future purpose yet to be determined. On the left, there is the beautiful **parco Basaglia (3)** (Basaglia park).



The Basaglia park

THE BASAGLIA PARK

Basaglia Park, with the row of buildings that once housed a mental asylum, has today become a symbol of the profound, suffered and enthusiastic revolution sparked by Franco Basaglia (1924–1980) in Gorizia, which led to Law 180 of 1978 and, with it, the closing of the dreadful containment institutions. A Venetian psychiatrist with a broad vision, a lively lecturer, and the author of seminal texts for the reform of mental healthcare, Franco Basaglia was a true 'wall breaker': he tore down the barrier that separated the world of those with mental health issues, confined for life, from the 'healthy', who were largely unaware of the existence of such a completely different world.

It is worth noting that this act of liberation from the slavery of illness took place right next to another wall – the one that divided the different parts of Gorizia. The perimeter barrier of the Basaglia Park actually coincides with the state border. At present, there is a significant process of redeveloping the park, within which the Mental Health Centre remains active. In memory of Basaglia, there are plans to transform the area into a vibrant cultural space accessible to all citizens from both sides of the former border.

Leaving the park, you enter the city via Via Vittorio Veneto. At the first roundabout, turn right to enter Piazza San Rocco. This is a very characteristic area of the city where the majority of inhabitants mainly speak the Friulian language. In the centre of the square stands a fountain (currently without water) topped with an Egyptian obelisk, brought and installed by the great Slovenian architect Anton Laščak (Gorizia 1856 – Cairo 1946). A brief visit to the sober Church of San Rocco is recommended. If you happen to pass through around mid-August, don't miss the traditional Sagra, whose long history spans several centuries.

Sant'Antonio square



Continue uphill along Via Lantieri and after a short walk reach the scenic Piazza Sant'Antonio.

On the left, you are greeted by the beautiful Palazzo Lantieri, which hosted famous figures such as Goethe, Schiller, Casanova, none other than Napoleon Bonaparte, and even Pope Pius VI on his journey to Vienna. Next, there is the cloister of an ancient 14th-century Franciscan convent, traditionally said to have been founded by Saint Anthony of Padua himself and used until the 18th century. In the centre, the traces of the walls of the small church dedicated to Saint Catherine can still be seen. Today, the elegant arcades are very popular, thanks to



The Cathedral

the welcoming commercial establishments in the area.

To the left, one can also see the wide facade of Palazzo Strassoldo, another noble residence that hosted some of the French royal court during the Goritian exile of the last Bourbon king, Charles X. In the old stables of the palace there is a small, yet frequently visited cloistered monastery called Totus Tuus, an interesting space for silence and prayer in the heart of the city.

The next square is dedicated to Camillo Benso, the Count of Cavour. On the left is the palace that today houses the police headquarters, with an elegant arch through which one enters the Piazza del Duomo, known as Corte Sant'Ilario. It was once the seat of the government of the Provincial States, following the death of the last Count of Gorizia, Leonardo, in 1500.

The **duomo (4)** (cathedral) deserves a thorough visit, even though it was largely rebuilt after the destruction it suffered in the First World War. Original areas here include the Gothic apse, the evocative chapel of Saint Acacius on the right, and the chapel of Saint Anne on the left. There are numerous altars dedicated to saints, featuring remarkable works of art, among which the stuccoes under the matronea and the 18th-century pulpit certainly deserve mention. The church is a cathedral, meaning that it houses the "cathedra" of the Archbishop of Gorizia, but it is also metropolitan, as the Archdiocese of Gorizia – established in 1751 following the suppression of the Patriarchate of Aquileia – still has the Diocese of Trieste as its suffragan.

From Corte Sant'Ilario, exit west

onto a narrow sidewalk and cross the short Via Marconi. After about 10 metres, turn left onto the lively Via Mazzini that is closed to vehicular traffic. Between balconies and the artistically crafted keystones of the doorways, you soon reach a large white building, Palazzo Attems Santa Croce, currently the seat of the Gorizia City Hall. It has a rich and complex history and is home to important works of art. The garden is also very beautiful, with lush vegetation and a central neoclassical temple, an ideal setting for civil weddings celebrated in spring or summer. Looking south, one can see the large yellow courthouse built in 1902 to the design of

a Polish architect. Nearby, on Via Barzellini, there is the Gorizia prison, a city within the city, completely hidden and often forgotten. The route continues along Via Garibaldi, the beautiful street that runs in front of the bright façade of the City Hall. Take note of the portals and facades of the old houses surrounding the small Church of the Immaculate Conception, usually closed to the public. It is a fine example of Goritian Baroque, with valuable paintings inside, including one attributed to the famous painter Giulio Quaglio (1668–1751). There is also a notable painting by Emma Galli (1893–1982), a highly beloved and appreciated painter in

Gorizia who had her studio nearby, as indicated by a plaque placed halfway along the street. The sculptures on the façade are dedicated to Saint Andrew and Blessed Daniele Ungerspach, an intriguing lay figure fascinated by the Camaldolese friars, born in Cormons in 1344 and assassinated in the convent of Murano in 1411.

Continuing on, you reach the 'posh quarter' of the city of Gorizia, with the Teatro Verdi and the pedestrian area of Corso Verdi, lined with numerous bars, shop windows filled with goods, and well-stocked book stores. Moving on, you enter Via Diaz, formerly called Via Alvarez due

to the presence of the enormous palace built by a Spanish noble family, later inherited to become a centre for orphaned children. It was subsequently used as a hospital and retirement home before being purchased by the University of Udine to house its branch in Gorizia. Opposite is a church with a charming bell tower, surrounded by a small garden. Originally Lutheran, it is now Methodist-Wesleyan, built and inaugurated in 1864 at the behest of the German industrialist Ritter family, of Evangelical faith, who wished to establish a Protestant place of worship. After suffering damage during the First World War, the church was restored and

The Wesleyan Methodist Evangelical Church



Diocesan building in Via Seminario



still serves today as the centre for the active Methodist and Waldensian community in the city, a group that strongly promotes initiatives for peace awareness and education. The interior is simple and austere, in line with the principles of the Reformation, already known in Gorizia after the preaching of Primož Trubar in the second half of the 16th century, but later erased from collective memory due to the Habsburgs' firm adherence to Catholicism and their consequent expulsion of all Evangelical preachers.

You walk around the church grounds along Via Randaccio and arrive at Piazza Cesare Battisti. The first building on the left houses the historic Unione Ginnastica Goriziana, while the entire western side is occupied by the large Caserma Guella, which in the early 20th century was a luxurious hotel. Passing by the

Enrico Toti monument, you return to Corso Verdi, making sure not to miss the beautiful Trgovski dom, designed by architect Maks Fabiani in 1902, which today is home to Gorizia's bright and welcoming Slovenian Library (Knjižnica Fiegl).

From here, you continue north along Corso Verdi. You pass the covered market, the Post Office building – a notable example of Fascist architecture – the Santa Chiara Monastery, now hosting prestigious exhibitions, and arrive at the area of the Gorizia Major Seminary. This is an imposing Austro-Hungarian-era building where a considerable part of the city's cultural and religious history unfolded. Next to it, in the middle of **Via Seminario (5)** on the left, is another more modern building, owned by the diocese, which offers pleasant hospitality. This is the ideal destination for the third stage of the tour.

From Gorizia to Sveta Gora

km 17 - h. 6:00 - Difficulty: Difficult

STAGE FOUR:
NEW WORLD

4

Municipalities crossed:

Municipality of Gorizia, Municipality of Nova Gorica. Both municipalities have local public transport services (both urban and suburban), as well as a train station. The two cities are also connected by a cross-border bus line.

Altitude difference: +804 m, -116 m

Maximum altitude: 682 m a.s.l.

Minimum altitude: 81 m a.s.l.

Terrain: 70% asphalt, 30% gravel

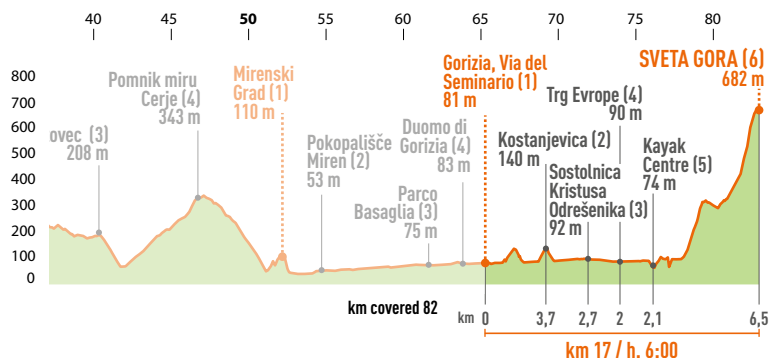
Critical points: Pay attention while crossing the roundabout immediately before the start of the trail to Sveta Gora.

Starting again from the facility on **Via Seminario (1)**, you enter one of the most beautiful sections of the route, even though in recent years it has become increasingly margin-

alised from city life. Via San Giovanni extends from Corso Verdi, a narrow street lined with tall buildings up to the small square dedicated to Archbishop Francesco Borgia

The gate of the former Jewish Ghetto





Sedej. Here stands the Church of St John the Baptist, built in 1590, which today serves as the parish church attended by most of Gorizia's Slovenian-speaking faithful.

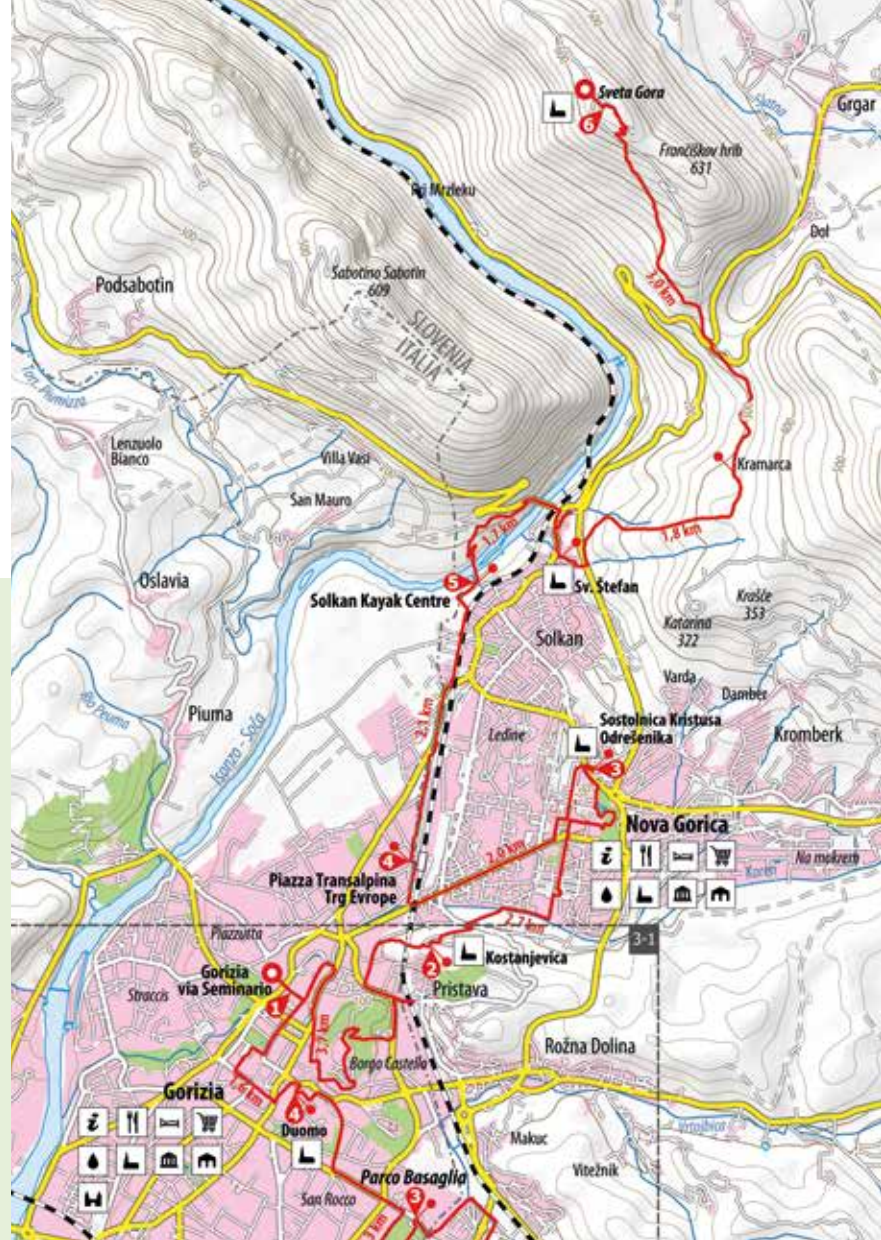
Immediately after that, you enter the old Jewish ghetto. Next to the church is an 18th-century house where the Jewish linguist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli (1829-1907) once lived.

THE JEWISH GHETTO

The most remarkable building in the area is undoubtedly the synagogue, one of the most significant testimonies to Jewish presence in Central Europe. It dates back to 1756, and a plaque also shows the date according to the Hebrew calendar, which counts the years from the creation of the world: 1 Elul 5516. The structure is easily recognisable, not least because at the top of the façade one finds the Tablets of the Law, engraved with the Ten Commandments.

In the inner courtyard, a memorial plaque lists the names and ages of 73 Jews deported by the Nazis to extermination camps – most of them in a single night on 23 November 1943. Only two returned. Among the victims was a 3-month-old child, Bruno Farber, from a family originally from Gorizia that had been arrested in Ferrara and later deported. The garden behind the synagogue is dedicated to him, as noted on a plaque affixed to the large, ornate gate that at one stage prevented access to the ghetto area.

The official presence of the Jewish community, although almost wiped out by Nazism, continued until 1969 when, having become too small, it was merged with the community of Trieste. What remains today is the memory of the place of worship and the legacy of many notable figures: the linguist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, the philosopher Carlo Michelstaedter, the journalist Carolina Luzzatto, the Morpurgo family of doctors, the painter Vittorio Bolaffio,





and the rabbi Isacco Samuele Reggio to whom the staircase connecting Farber Garden with the ancient bed of the Corno stream is dedicated. It is also worth noting the nearby houses, many of which feature narrow slits beside their doors, now unfortunately sealed with cement. These once held parchments inscribed with verses of God's Law, in accordance with the commandment to write those words on the door posts. Some buildings still display their year of construction marked according to the Hebrew calendar.

pag. 63 The Church of Saint Ignatius in Piazza Vittoria

The cloister of the Archbishop's Palace



Continue along Via Ascoli to its end, then turn right and pass in front of the splendid Palazzo Attems Petzenstein, a grand neoclassical building adorned with impressive statues representing the gods of Olympus. Inside, it hosts numerous art exhibitions and important conferences, making it a significant cultural centre. Proceed along Via Carducci, once known as *Via dei Signori*. It is now visibly in decline as many of the shops that once made it particularly lively have unfortunately closed. Passing under the arch that leads into Via Favetti, continue toward the city centre. After passing the former Monte di Pietà, now home to the Cassa di Risparmio di Gorizia Foundation, you arrive at a small, harmoniously balanced square dominated by Palazzo Cobenzl – the official seat of the Archbishopric of Gorizia since its construction in 1751, following the suppression of the Patriarchate of Aquileia, decreed by Pope Benedict XIV and Empress Maria Theresa of Austria.

The central section of the building, facing the street, was constructed in the first half of the 18th century. Through a wide entrance hall and up an elegant marble staircase lies the Hall of the Archbishops, which displays portraits of all the prelates who have led the Catholic community. The lateral wing, extending toward the castle hill and containing the residences of bishops and collaborators, was added in the early 20th century. It includes the Archbishop's private chapel, with stained-glass windows depicting

Saints Hermagoras and Fortunatus and other Aquileian saints, commissioned by the Slovenian archbishop Jakob Missia (1838–1902), the only prelate of Gorizia to have been elevated to cardinal.

Also remarkable is the palatine chapel, a graceful little church with a simple and harmonious façade facing outwards, dedicated to the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Built in 1746, it is an elegant and significant example of Goritian Baroque architecture.

You then arrive at Piazza Vittoria, dominated by the nearby castle hill. In its centre stands the beautiful Fountain of Neptune, whose construction is attributed to Niccolò Pacassi. Many interesting buildings line this square, which was once called Piazza Grande or Travnik (a Slovenian word meaning “the meadow”). Most striking among them are the Government Palace, located on the southern side, and the Church of Saint Ignatius, which recalls the significant presence of the Jesuits in Gorizia. The façade resembles that of an ancient temple, with a central statue of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, crowned by the distinctive IHS monogram. To the left stands a statue of Saint Joseph, patron of the Habsburgs, while on the right is Saint John the Baptist.

The year 1721 marks the beginning of construction by the Austrian architect Christoph Tausch, and the works were completed in 1723. The final consecration of the church was celebrated in 1767 by Carlo Michele d'Attems, the first Archbishop of Gorizia.

The architectural style is unmistakably Baroque, while the various side chapels illustrate theological themes that became especially significant after the Council of Trent and in the debates surrounding the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Behind the main altar, one can admire the magnificent painting "The Glory of Saint Ignatius", also created by Christoph Tausch in 1721.

After passing the statue of Saint Ignatius and walking around the Government Palace, you enter the charming Via Rastello, located in the oldest part of the city. Walk about halfway down the street, admiring its beautiful historic shops: you might fancy stopping for a drink in one of the many traditional taverns. A turn to the left allows you to climb toward the castle, passing through the characteristic Cocevia district –

originally, and up until the early 18th century, the first settlement area of Gorizia's Jewish community.

Following a short descent, you'll notice on the right the elegant ancient arcades and a statue dedicated to the philosopher Carlo Michelstaedter. Also on the right, already in Piazza Cavour, stands the picturesque Ungrispach House (1441). From its balcony, it is said that around the mid-16th century the famous Reformation preacher Primož Trubar – regarded as the father of Slovenian literature – gave several highly successful sermons. He was the author of the first texts published in the Slovenian vernacular: a catechism and a primer.

Continue the climb toward the castle along Via D'Annunzio, formerly known simply as the "ascent to the castle". It's best to stay on the main

road, taking advantage of the wide side walk and ignoring the staircase on the left, which runs inside the Venetian walls.

You'll soon reach the Leopold Gate, built (albeit never completed) in 1660 to honour the visit of Emperor Leopold I of Austria to Gorizia. Classical in style, the gate is adorned with numerous symbols reflecting the city's rich historical heritage.

Passing through it, you enter Borgo Castello, an area with many fascinating houses built between the 15th and 17th centuries.

You now find yourself in the heart of the original Gorizia, where the houses are located on the hill that gave the city its name – as recorded in the first official document mentioning it, dated 1001. This was a deed of donation from Emperor Otto III of the Holy Roman Empire to the Patriarch

of Aquileia, John, referring to "*villa quae Sclavorum lingua vocatur Goriza*" ("the village called Goriza in the Slavic tongue").

Archaeological excavations near the cathedral and on the castle hill itself have in recent years revealed structures that appear to predate the Ottonian document, thereby pushing back the origins of the city's history considerably.

Several characteristic local taverns offer regional food and wine specialties. Also noteworthy are some of the oldest surviving houses, one of which hosts the unmissable War Museum. From 1824 to 1968, this building housed hundreds of orphaned girls thanks to the initiative of the enterprising priest Giovanni Contavalle (Bologna 1743 – Gorizia 1827).

After being moved to a modern

Rastello street



The Castle of Gorizia



building in the new Sant'Anna district, the property of the institution was acquired by the Province of Gorizia. Around 1984, artefacts from the First World War, previously kept in Palazzo Attems, were transferred here. Over time, the new collection has become a model example of how to commemorate the tragedies of war without falling into partisan rhetoric – especially meaningful in Gorizia, a city that suffered profoundly during the First World War. Also not to be missed is a look at the Gothic Church of the Holy Spirit, the oldest church in the city, built in 1399. Now standing alone among the trees, with poetic and artistic grace it seems to guard the entrance to the castle.

A final, short climb along a porphyry-paved path leads to the castle entrance, whose importance is also

symbolised by the presence of its towers in the old coat of arms of Gorizia.

Before passing under the great gateway, it's worth pausing to look at the plaque placed on the right side of the gate leading to the broad northern bastion. It commemorates the anti-fascist Slovenians, Italians, and Friulians who saw the light of day for the last time at this very spot – a sombre reminder of an era marked by violence and oppression, one of the many tragic episodes of the Fascist period and the Nazi occupation. The castle itself is also well worth a visit. Its interior is highly evocative, featuring a steep passage set between walls that leads to the entrance. Inside, visitors can admire the vast Count's Hall and the atmospheric Hall of the Provincial Estates, as well as the spacious reception

rooms on the upper floor, rich in history and works of art. From an archaeological perspective, the most interesting area is on the ground floor where in the harmonious inner courtyard one can see the foundations of the first watchtower built around the year 1000. Until not long ago, this structure was considered the oldest surviving evidence of human settlement in Gorizia.

It's now time to head back down, following the path descending the hill, on the opposite side from where the climb began, surrounded by lush greenery. Exit through the main gate of the castle and take the stairway immediately to the left. Halfway down, turn left again, and from there simply follow the well-marked pedestrian route. The trail passes through one of the lower towers of the castle and continues down via a comfortable iron staircase to the base of the massive eastern walls. From here, the path runs alongside the walls before turning into a steep, winding trail that passes through dense vegetation – filled with fragrant flowers in spring and breathtaking colours in autumn. For a moment, you may forget that you're so close to the city centre. After passing a small playground located above the Bombi tunnel, the route reaches Via Giustiniani, the main road leading from the large Casa Rossa square toward the centre of Nova Gorica and the village of Solkan. Continue along it northward for less than 1 km, following the shared pedestrian and cycle path.

This brings you to the Rafut area,

where the building once used by Italian border guards now houses the fascinating Museum of the Border Pass. Using modern multimedia techniques, the museum tells the region's entire story – from the First World War to the Treaty of Rapallo, from Fascism to the Second World War, from the Treaty of Paris to the border line that once ran between houses, from Yugoslavia to Slovenia, and finally to the end of border controls and the establishment of the European Capital of Culture.

On the Slovenian side, in the small former border guard post, there is also an original museum dedicated to smuggling, offering another perspective on life along this once-divided frontier.

Continuing past the Rafut intersection, you enter the neighbourhood known as "del Cristo" ("of the Christ"), named after a faded but still visible fresco depicting Christ on what remains of a house wall demolished in the early 2000s. Leaving the crucifix behind, you join the quiet Via della Cappella, whose name derives from the first small chapel built on the hill, originally simply called *Kapela*.

On the left, the large building today housing the Vitaliano Fumagalli primary school stands out. Opposite, a plaque marks the house where brothers Josip and Edvard Rusjan began their aeronautical construction experiments, marking an important early chapter in aviation history.

On 25 November 1909, the brothers' first air plane flew for several dozen metres over a field near Cam-

The Church of the Holy Spirit in Borgo Castello



pagnuza – the first flight of its kind ever made in Southern Europe, just 6 years after the Wright brothers' first 'hop'. This and their later achievements earned them recognition among the true pioneers of aviation in Europe and worldwide, even though their careers were tragically short. In 1911, during a demonstration flight in Belgrade, the eighth aircraft they had built crashed. Edvard, who was seriously injured, died shortly after in a Belgrade hospital. At this point, a steep ascent begins on a stretch of smooth stone pavement, one of the most beautiful surfaces in the city. At the first fork, turn right, passing by a charming Mari-an shrine dating to 1705, attributed

to the skilled stonecutter Giovanni Pacassi (father of the more famous sculptor and architect Niccolò). The Madonna and Child are surrounded by fluttering angels, and an inscription invites pilgrims ascending the hill to pause for devout prayer. The paved path then becomes a dirt track, then concrete, closed to vehicular traffic. A few metres ahead, you re-enter Slovenia. The final metres of the climb run along the ridge of the hill, among wide olive groves and increasingly expansive panoramic views. You reach the square below the **Kostanjevica Convent (2)**, another important site and further testament to the historical and cultural plurality of the region.

The Sanctuary of Kostanjevica



KOSTANJEVICA (CHAPEL)

A cultural and historical gem between the two Gorizias

On a 143-metre-high hill in the southern part of Nova Gorica – named after the chestnut trees that once dominated the hill and located in the western-most part of the Panovec urban forest – stands the Church of the Annunciation and the connected Franciscan Monastery of Kostanjevica.

The monastery houses the tomb of the last members of the French royal family, the Bourbons: the last King of France, Charles X, his five relatives, and a court minister. Charles X was forced to abdicate the throne after the July Revolution of 1830, left France, and after years in exile arrived in Gorizia in 1836 at the invitation of the Counts Coronini, where he died – possibly of cholera – after only 17 days. He is the only French king buried outside France and, of course, the only one in Slovenia.

Among the monastery's attractions – one of 13 Franciscan convents in Slovenia – is the large library, holding over 16,500 books, including some precious incunabula, the oldest dating back to 1476. The monastery also boasts the second-largest publicly accessible collection of Bourbon roses in Europe, featuring 80 varieties. Their blooms are at their peak in early May, during the Nova Gorica Rose Festival, reflecting the rose in the city's emblem.

The church of Kostanjevica was built in 1623 by Count Matija Thurn. Since the first place of prayer was much smaller, the hill and chapel were originally named Kapela. The monastery, built shortly after, housed many works of art until the First World War when much of the collection was destroyed. Today, the monastery is an important religious and cultural centre, hosting concerts, conferences, and other events. Since 1994, the eastern part of the monastery has been home to Slovenia's first Don Pierino Gelmini Incontro Community, offering a supportive environment for former drug addicts committed to transforming their lives through determination, work and discipline.

Around 250 metres after the border, you reach a wide terrace in front of the church and monastery entrance. From here, you enjoy a splendid panoramic view stretching to Cerje, Šempeter, Gorizia Castle, and parts of the old town. Looking in the opposite direction, towards the north, you can see much of No-

va Gorica from above, as if holding in your hand the three peaks that overlook it: Sabotin, Škabrijel, and Sveta Gora.

From Kostanjevica, descend along the paved road to the traffic lights, where you cross the main road connecting Nova Gorica with Rožna Dolina, then continue toward the

first apartment buildings overlooking the Koren stream. After crossing the watercourse on a small wooden bridge, turn right along the path running beside it. Only at the end of the fenced playground of the Fran Erjavec elementary school, after about 500 metres, turn left and approach Kidričeva Street (Magistrala).

This is the main street that architect Edvard Ravnikar envisioned in 1947 as the backbone of the city, while

designing and planning it. Shortly after, having walked 1.5 km from the state border, you reach on the right the residential blocks of Kidričeva Street, decorated with several commemorative monuments. On the first of these, the so-called Russian blocks (*ruski bloki*), a plaque recalls that on 13 June 1948, "in this place the first stone was laid, on which the first building of Nova Gorica was constructed".

NOVA GORICA

A city built out of necessity, united with its older sister

Nova Gorica is a young city, the youngest in Slovenia, born out of necessity after 15 September 1947 when the Paris Peace Treaty drew the new state border, leaving Gorizia on the Italian side. At that time, the area of present-day Nova Gorica was mostly fields, and the inhabitants of nearby Solkan and the wider Gorizia region, on the eastern side of the border, suddenly found themselves without the town centre they had relied upon. In the post-Second World War enthusiasm, the idea quickly emerged – politically supported – to build a new city, a socialist city with modern architecture and wide streets, meant to "shine across the border". The urban plan by architect Edvard Ravnikar was chosen for this ambitious project. Brigades of young people from across Yugoslavia participated in the city's construction, which grew rapidly in an atmosphere of brotherhood and unity. In less than 1 year, from the end of 1947 to the end of 1948, over 5,000 young volunteers helped primarily with preparing the basic infrastructure, essential for the start of more complex building works.

Later, enthusiasm for the first entirely new city in Yugoslavia waned somewhat: funding, once plentiful, ran out, and Ravnikar's ambitious plan could not be fully realised. Instead, it was gradually adapted and supplemented with solutions from other architects and modified to suit more modest local needs. Over time, people of all backgrounds began moving there, as it became necessary to develop all sectors of work. After the basic infrastructure and residential blocks were built, all necessary services, factories and institutions essential for urban life gradually took shape, providing everything needed for a growing population.

When the initial strictness and impermeability of the border security forces eased somewhat, the regime loosened its grip and allowed people to cross the border, albeit with restrictions. Nova Gorica was written in bold letters on the map of Yugoslavia.

A wave of cross-border shopping erupted. People from all over the federation flocked to Nova Gorica and old Gorizia to buy jeans – which at the time were not available in Yugoslavia – technical instruments, coffee, nylon stockings, and many other products. The merchants of Gorizia were, of course, happy to shake hands and do business.

Only a certain amount of money could be carried across the border, and only a limited quantity of goods could be brought back – or otherwise a heavy customs duty had to be paid – but people always found ways to pass the border controls without problems. Commerce boomed. At that time, residents living within 10 kilometres of the border were privileged since they held special passes (*prepustnica*) that facilitated crossings and exchanges, allowing them more frequent border crossings, more money to carry, and the possibility to purchase larger quantities of goods.

Those were good times for both Gorizia and Slovenia, but they are now a thing of the past. With Slovenia's independence, and especially its accession to the European Union, these privileges ceased, and the two Gorizias were not adequately prepared for this change.

Suddenly, all the services were no longer just locally available: they could be easily found also elsewhere. The flow of customers dried up, and the prominence of the two cities shrank considerably on maps.

In 1984, the company Hit was founded, and Nova Gorica soon became the Las Vegas of Slovenia, first with its initial casino in the Park Hotel and later with the Perla Casino and Entertainment Centre. For many years, Hit was the state's golden goose, thanks to the high taxes imposed on gambling. Players, mostly Italians, crossed the border to spend their money in the casinos, in much the same way that shoppers from all over Yugoslavia had 'pilgrimed' to Gorizia to buy products unavailable at home.

However, like both Gorizias after the border opened, Hit rested on its laurels. Instead of diversifying tourism, the company bet everything on gambling, which proved not to be the best move for regional development.

The city, still young, is in a perfect location, surrounded by its older sister Gorizia and the towns of Friuli, the Collio/Brda hills, the Isonzo valley, the Trnovo and Banjščice plateau, the Vipava valley, and the Karst region. In terms of the growing demand for outdoor activities and sustainable tourism, this location is a major advantage. The region also offers cultural and historical richness, a mild climate, and a unique cross-border character, all of which could form the basis for a new success story together with Gorizia, focused on green technologies, cycling and walking paths, historical and cultural tourism, and food and wine experiences – opportunities still not fully realised.

Continue along Kidričeva street toward the city centre, walking straight until you reach the roundabout by the skyscraper on the right, just past the post office building. Looking up, you can see your destination for the Way of Gorizia, Sveta Gora.

On both sides of the road – and especially in the park near the bus station – there are many trees that were planted shortly after the city's construction, which still enhance its appearance today. Among them are numerous exotic species that thrive thanks to the favourable climate, highly appreciated during the Austro-Hungarian period. Although Nova Gorica did not yet exist at the time, Gorizia was called the "Austrian Nice". The city and its surroundings were promoted as a pleasant health resort with a mild climate, beneficial for both physical and mental well-being. Consequently, ever more distinguished visitors came here. Gorizia was even considered the best winter health resort in the Austrian monarchy, surpassing even the distant southern Dalmatia.

Crossing the roundabout by the skyscraper, to the east there is a lawn in front of the municipal building, where the old Gorizia cemetery once stood. It was much larger than the current space, measuring approximately 300 x 200 metres, starting at the intersection below the modern Eda Centre, the city's tallest building at 62 metres, and extending to the current Slovenian National Theatre building. It is

said that 28,000 people were buried there, far more than the city's current population. The cemetery was closed in 1916 because the front line passed through it.

Today, the municipal lawn, which occasionally hosts celebrations and other events, is bounded to the east by the theatre and to the north by the Nova Gorica City Hall. Its entrance is adorned with four statues by Boris Kalin, symbolising the land won through blood after the Second World War, as well as resistance, struggle, victory and peace.

Continuing along Kidričeva street, on the left side of the road you'll pass a park with a monument to the writer France Bevk. A little further ahead, at a pedestrian crossing, is the main square of Nova Gorica, also named after Bevk.

Instead of entering the square, turn right at the City Hall and walk along its side toward the library, which is likewise dedicated to France Bevk. Continue walking between the library and the theatre toward the pineta, one of the city's largest green spaces. Behind the bright library building, a beautiful glass facade invites you inside, offering a quiet space to read, study, or simply enjoy the written word.

Following the park paths, on the right you'll see a small pond, home to many aquatic and migratory birds – a peaceful natural oasis perfect for a brief rest and a mental recharge. If you need a break from walking on asphalt, a bench is available; otherwise, continue past the skate park.

Ahead, you can see the modern bell tower of the **Sostolnica Kristusa Odrešenika (3)** (Christ the Saviour Cathedral) and, behind it, the Sveta Gora (Holy Mount). To your left rises the hotel section of the Hit Perla casino. Continue walking until you reach a traffic-light intersection: after crossing, you will directly reach the cathedral.

At the time of its foundation, Nova Gorica did not have a bell tower. Like with other similar cities built during the socialist period, Nova Gorica's original project did not include – in its central area – a space for a religious building. It was only in 1980, when Yugoslav politics stopped being so critical of the different religious confessions, that a building licence was issued for the erection of an ecclesiastic centre, located between Kidričeva and Vo-

jkova. In front of the church, projected by architect Franc Kvaternik and consecrated in 1982, there is a small square and, by the bell tower, a statue of Frančišek Borgia Sedej, a former bishop of Gorizia. Since 2004, the church of Christ the Saviour has been the co-cathedral of Capodistria's diocese, and the only church in Slovenia to hold such a status. It is also the parish church of the parish of Nova Gorica.

From the co-cathedral go back to the crossroad, cross it and follow along Kidričeva street, passing in front of the Hit Perla casino and the district court building. In the west, you can see the skyscrapers of Gradnikove Brigade street, where many people live. You will soon reach the town hall again: turn towards piazza Bevk, the city's true centre. Here you can easily find shops, a news-

The Christ the Saviour Cathedral



paper seller, a break for something to eat or drink. Our route continues among pubs and other shopping venues until we reach the monument Ikarus (1960) dedicated to Edvard Rusjan, the first Slovenian aviator. Shortly after, you will notice against the sky the above-mentioned Eda centre, today the city's most imposing building.

Continue along Erjavčeva street, the ancient road connection with Gorizia's old cemetery, until you reach the border, about 1 km away. Once again, the road is shadowed by tall trees, and is famous for the memory of many important personalities of the Slovenian and littoral territory of Gorizia: their bronze busts are placed one after the other along the way. You will cross the railway near the border of via san Gabriele, where you will turn right, following

the sign for **Trg Evrope (4)** (Europa square). It is interesting to note that the square where the two cities meet still does not have only one name. On the Italian side, it is called Transalpina, while in Slovenia it is called Evropa square. And right there, at the junction point of the two cities, in front of the railway station of Nova Gorica, on the night between 30 April and 1 May 2004, the main event marking the entrance of Slovenia into the EU took place. As you walk towards the station, it is worth noticing the now plain little wall skirting the road on your left. It once used to be the basis of an impenetrable border fence. The railway station you are approaching also houses the Kolodvor collection, one of the minor sites of the Goriški muzej dedicated to the border, all interesting and worth visiting.

Square Trg Evrope - Piazza Transalpina



In front of the railway station, the square is adorned with a pavement mosaic by Franco Vecchiet titled 57/15, the same as the old border marker that stood here at one time. Many tourists delight in placing their right foot in one country and their left in another – a peculiarity the people of Gorizia take for granted, but which still amazes visitors. It's thus no wonder that Europa/Transalpina square is a magnet for many.

From the square, one enters Italy directly and turns right, keeping the station building behind. Attention should be paid to the markings on the pedestrian and cycle path while continuing along the border. Soon, the route returns to the Slovenian side, on the cycle path leading up to the former Solkan border crossing. The side walk continues along the

road toward the centre of Solkan. To the west, a fence runs alongside the street, marking the border between Slovenia and Italy. One passes in front of the brick building of the Mostovna youth centre. A little further on, near the Gorica foundry, the road is crossed and a left turn is taken before the railway underpass, toward the Solkan commercial area, home to some successful high-tech companies.

You walk parallel to the railway tracks until reaching the level crossing, cross it, and turn left toward the **Solkan Kayak Centre (5)** on the Soča (Isonzo) River. After 7 km of walking from the border crossing, you arrive at the pedestrian bridge over the Isonzo. The walkway, 120 metres long and 3 metres wide, was opened to pedestrians and cyclists in 2022. It of-

The river Soča at the Kayak Center di Solkan





Steel pedestrian and cycling bridge over the Soča in Solkan

fers a beautiful view of the arched road bridge and the railway bridge behind it. You can also admire the kayak centre and the course used for international competitions on the river.

Every summer, the area also becomes a swimming spot where the residents of Solkan have traditionally bathed in the cold waters of the Soča, especially in the hot season. However, the possibility of a sudden rise in water levels – caused by the hydroelectric plant built a few hundred metres upstream – makes the river particularly dangerous for the inexperienced, and unfortunately, several people have drowned.

Beyond the river, follow a combined cycling and pedestrian path with two hairpin turns. At the first intersection, where the dirt trail turns left toward Italy, continue on

the opposite side along the busy G1 bike path, paved, in the direction of Plave. Hikers and walkers who want to add some excitement to the Way of Gorizia can explore magnificent trails in this area to conquer the 'Triglav of Gorizia', the three Goritian mountains (Sabotin, Sveta Gora and Škabrijel). The bike path, on the other hand, descends toward the road bridge over the Isonzo and then continues to Plave and Kanal ob Soči (pay close attention to the numerous cyclists and ignore the paved bike path branch toward Solkan, which climbs steeply toward the Sabotin road).

Once you reach the bridge's pillars, an imposing structure with a large concrete arch, you must climb the steep wooden stairs using the steel rope anchored to the ground. At the top of the staircase, after

crossing the road fence, head toward the river. From the left side of the bridge, you can see the Solkan railway bridge, built in 1907 and rebuilt after the First World War in 1927; it remains the largest stone arch bridge in the world. From the centre of the road bridge, 55 metre high, bungee jumping takes place on weekends, with jumpers plunging into the Isonzo River over 50 metres below, secured only by an elastic cord (advance booking is required for the jump).

Once you reach the mainland, turn right. After walking about 150 metres along the road, cross at the pedestrian crossing and turn left

for a short detour leading to the Solkan cemetery, the Woodworking Museum, and the point where the pilgrimage route to Sveta Gora once began. In the past, there were two stone pillars, known as *kalonci*, marking the start of the pilgrimage. To commemorate these artefacts and honour the many pilgrims who historically commenced their journey from this spot, a stone column was erected at the beginning of 2024. Unfortunately, from this point it is no longer possible to reach Mount Sveta Gora as the pilgrimage path has been cut off by the Solkan bypass road.

The Solkan Stone Bridge



SOLKAN

When Solkan already was a 'castle' in 1001, Gorizia was just a village

The current area of Solkan was already inhabited in prehistoric times, as confirmed by archaeological findings. The first written reference to the place is a donation by Emperor Otto III on 28 April 1001 to Patriarch John of Aquileia, through which he granted "half of the castle, which is called Solkan, and half of the village, which in the Slavic language is called Gorica". On 15 September 1947, Solkan was annexed to Yugoslavia. Since Nova Gorica was still under construction and Gorizia was inaccessible, the political and administrative bodies of the district were hosted in Solkan. In 1955, Solkan became an integral part of Nova Gorica. In 1988, it regained the status of an independent settlement.

The town boasts several cultural and historical attractions. The most famous is the stone arch bridge featuring the largest span in the world. Also of interest are the monument to the partisans, the fountain dedicated to the river in the main square, the Woodworking Museum, a private war museum, and Villa Bartolomei, the administrative seat of the Goriški Museum. The Soča River is a major attraction for kayakers from all over the world, who are regular visitors, but other forms of sports tourism are also developing, such as mountain biking down the slopes of Sveta Gora. The connection with Nova Gorica is so close that it is difficult to identify a clear boundary between the end of one settlement and the beginning of the other.

Since it is no longer possible to ascend along the old pilgrimage path, one must return to the main road and then walk to the central square, dedicated to the partisan patriot Jože Srebrnič. The square is also a good place to take a break before starting the climb, with a bar and a restaurant/pizzeria. Keeping to the left side, after the building that houses the cultural centre – the heart of the village's social life, with many commemorative plaques on its façade – one heads toward the Church of Saint Stephen.

The original Gothic church, later rebuilt in Baroque style, was constructed in 1566, although experts

do not rule out that a church already existed here much earlier, shortly after the year 1000. Directly in front of the church, on the wall next to the parking lot, there is a historical Latin inscription: "Medietatem unius castelli quod dicitur Siliganum et medietatem unius ville que sclavorum lingua vocatur Goriza", which means, "Half of the castle called Siliganum and half of the village called Gorica in the Slavic language". On the occasion marking a millennium since the first official document mentioning Solkan, its inhabitants wanted to honour this venerable age by promoting the construction of the monument with its inscription.

From Kostanjevica to the Church of Solkan, you have covered a distance of 9 km.

The final ascent to Sveta Gora begins right at the Church of Saint Stephen. Facing the stone steps at the entrance, take the path to the right, and at the first intersection turn left into a narrow alley that runs alongside the church walls on one side and houses on the other. After a few steps, continue until you reach a small stream. Along its bed, approach the overpass of the Solkan bypass. Go under the overpass, and a few steps later – before the asphalt road ends and turns into a dirt track – turn left onto a marked path that starts to climb steeply, running for a short stretch parallel to the road before turning decisively toward the quarry. Care must be taken to stay on the path more trodden.

At one point, there is an intersection above the large quarry, where the central and clearly more visible path should be followed.

Soon, you reach another fork and stay on the pipeline path. Further ahead, where another trail veers to the right, continue on the left path. The ascent along the gas pipeline is challenging – steep and straight, without switchbacks. It is followed by a short but gentle descent to a technical box of the infrastructure. In front, there is a hunting lookout, and you continue along the trail that passes under the power line, beginning a gentle climb, though soon the elevation just laboriously gained starts to be lost again.

Follow this path until you reach Kramarica, the isolated house beneath a large meadow, located 1.8 km from

The Sanctuary of Sveta Gora



the Church of Solkan. From here, there is a beautiful view of the Sabotin, particularly the San Valentino peak, as well as of the bike path and the Transalpina railway, which run along its slope just above the emerald Soča River, trapped in this area behind the dam of the Solkan hydro-electric plant. Slightly higher, from the north, Sveta Gora – the final destination – comes into view. It is no longer very far, but still requires some effort and a bit of breathless exertion.

From the house, continue along the cemented dirt road that gently descends, then rises again and leads to the asphalted Preval road. There, it joins the paved regional road that climbs from Nova Gorica toward Ravnica, Trnovo, and Lokve. A beautiful view of Gorizia and its surroundings is worth a brief stop. Then, carefully descend along the road, paying close attention to any traffic, until reaching a roundabout with a stylised statue of the shepherdess Urška Ferligoj with her sheep. According to tradition, Mary appeared to her in 1539 on Mount Sveta Gora, then called Skalnica. After cautiously crossing the roundabout, begin the ascent toward Sveta Gora, following the clear directions on the sign. A few metres from the first station of the Via Crucis (exactly 3 km from the Church of Solkan), where there is a wooden crucifix, leave the road and take the trail on the left. It's impossible to go wrong – there is a wooden sign reading "Sveta Gora" and an alpine trail marker on the ground.

As soon as you leave the asphalt, the trail intersects the downhill mountain bike track, so be careful! It is necessary to stop, look around, and listen, because some cyclists descend at high speed. Only when you are sure it is safe, with no risk of collision, should you cross the mountain bike 'track'.

After a few steps, you reach a point where the Po Rovih trail branches off to the right, and a sign reading "Trail across the battlefields of the Isonzo Front" indicates a steeper climb. It is best to resist the temptation and continue along the main trail, which gently ascends and is also marked.

Soon, you arrive at a new viewpoint, called Bellevue by the locals, offering a splendid panorama of Solkan, the Isonzo River, Nova Gorica, Gorizia, and beyond – from the Calvary above Gorizia to Trstelj.

At 750 metres from the first junction, leave the trail that continues to ascend gently in a straight line along the side of Sveta Gora, and instead climb decisively to the right, following the mountain trail markers, the Solomon's knot arrows, and the sign reading "Sveta Gora".

From here, a zig-zag trail unfolds along the steep slope of Sveta Gora. This final section, up to the junction with the paved road leading to the sanctuary, is also quite strenuous, but the effort is rewarded by the awareness that the destination is no longer far away.

A few steps below the road, which is already visible with its stone embankment, you encounter the

mountain bike track again, which requires some attention once more. Cross it, and continue climbing onto the asphalt. Beyond the road, there is a chapel and, next to it, the thirteenth station of the Via Crucis.

After passing the chapel, ascend the stone steps leading to the former upper station of the old cable car, now home to the TAU youth centre. After the steps, leaving to the right the path leading to TAU and Francesco Hill, turn left and walk past the cemetery and the broadcasting station,

heading toward the church and the nearby bell tower.

After less than 5 km from the Church of Santo Stefano in Solkan, 17 km from the start of the final stage, and almost 85 km from Aquileia, we finally reach the wide square in front of the entrance to the sanctuary of Sveta Gora (6), the endpoint of our journey. Here, as Bogdan Knavs, guardian of the Franciscan monastery, eloquently put it, "we are touching heavenly grace, earthly vastness, and the depths of our inner self".

SVETA GORA

One of the most important pilgrimage centres in Slovenia

Sveta Gora, with the Basilica of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and the Franciscan monastery rising above Solkan and the Isonzo River at an altitude of 682 metres above sea level, is visible in all its grandeur even from afar. The basilica at the top of the hill, also known as Skalnica, is one of the three most important pilgrimage centres in Slovenia and considered the most frequented in the western part of the country. Its unique location allows one to simultaneously view the Triglav and the sea, while also overlooking much of the Gorizia region on both sides of the border. Sveta Gora lies between Mount Sabotin, 609 metre high across the Soča, and Mount Škabrijel, 646 metres high. If these three hills could speak, they would tell both fascinating and tragic stories, as their slopes and peaks, which were once strategic points, were the sites of bloody events in the past.

Yet Monut Sveta Gora also exudes a particularly gentle and benevolent energy. Over the centuries, many pilgrims from near and far have climbed to its summit where, according to tradition, in 1539 Mary appeared to the shepherdess Urška Ferligoj from Grgar while she was tending her sheep on the slope, instructing her: "Tell the people to build me a house here and to ask for my mercy". Official authorities did not believe Urška and imprisoned her several times for "disturbing the population with her preaching", but she miraculously escaped each time. Nevertheless, in 1541 construction of the church began, and it was completed 3 years later. The Patriarch of Aquileia donated to the

church an image of the Virgin Mary, likely the work of the Venetian painter Jacopo Palma il Vecchio. The image was solemnly crowned in 1717, and devotees consider it highly significant.

During the excavation of the church's foundations, consecrated in 1544, builders found a rectangular slab with carved ornaments and the prayer of the Ave Maria. It was determined to be part of a church that had already existed in Skalnica in the 14th century, believed to have been destroyed by the Turks. Until 1565, the parish priests of Solkan were responsible for the sanctuary, which was visited by a growing number of pilgrims, and then the Franciscans took over, continuing to reside on Sveta Gora this day. The church today standing on the summit is at least the fourth built on the same site; the previous one was destroyed during the First World War. The church and monastery were first demolished in 1786 when the reforms of Emperor Joseph II came into effect, and the image of the Virgin Mary was moved to Solkan. In 1793, it returned to the partially reconstructed buildings. During the First World War, the image was safeguarded at the Franciscan convent of Stična near Ljubljana. It returned to Sveta Gora in 1922 and was again protected during the Second World War, finally returning permanently in 1951.

The current church was rebuilt after the First World War, modelled on the basilica of Aquileia. Constructed between 1924 and 1928, the neo-baroque building is dominated by a 50-metre-high bell tower. The image of the Queen of Sveta Gora is central in the church, but visitors and worshippers are also drawn to the carved ceiling, stained glass windows, and various works of art. There is also an interesting Marian Museum curated by Goriški Muzej, which houses a collection of sacred materials documenting devotion to the Virgin Mary and the history of the sanctuary. Hospitality is well developed, with a restaurant with lodgings, the TAU youth centre, a pilgrimage centre still awaiting renovation, and the Hiša mir in dobro (House of Peace and Goodness) for hikers, tourists, or those seeking a few days of retreat. In recent years, the site has also hosted an increasing number of cultural events, from concerts and choral performances to exhibitions and presentations.

Sveta Gora is also an excellent starting point for exploring the Gorizia region on both sides of the border, with opportunities for hiking, nature walks, and longer treks. Several long-distance trails reach, cross and pass over the hill, including the Three Sanctuaries Trail, the St Martin Trail (a cross-border circuit), the Saints Cyril and Methodius Trail, the Urška Shepherdess Trail, the Julian Alps Trail, and many others.

Given the ferocity of the battles that took place in the area during the First World War, Sveta Gora is also a perfect destination for military history enthusiasts. Walking through the hill's tunnels is a unique experience. It is in addition a magnet for cyclists, both road cyclists climbing the steep road to the summit and mountain bikers descending the slopes. Despite the bustling sports activity, it remains a true place of peace, ideal for reflecting on "who I

am and how I can move forward". It is also highly conducive to artistic creation, inspiring ideas and extraordinary art works, drawing from the transcendent and the special positive energy freely available to all open-minded and open-hearted people, regardless of their religion or culture.

As 2039 will mark the 500th anniversary of the Virgin Mary's apparition to Urška Ferligoj, it is fitting that Sveta Gora is shining again, proudly overlooking the valley, drawing more people to its summit in peace. This is one of the goals of this beautiful cross-border path from Aquileia to Sveta Gora, alongside filling everyone who walks it with experiences and knowledge that will forever remain imprinted on them.

One last look from above. To the south, on a beautiful sunny day, the shimmering waters of the Adriatic meet the mainland, the shipyards of Monfalcone, and the green Friulian plain. The lagoon of Grado can be glimpsed, and by gently following its outline, one can even spot the bell tower of Aquileia, where it all began. To the east stretches the cheerful Vipava Valley, dotted with white villages proudly displaying their church towers. The stone of the Karst converses with the clay of the Collio, and the memory of wars transforms into a majestic hymn to the beauty of fraternity and harmony.

To the west, the view is blocked by the mass of Mount Sabotin, a treasure chest preserving many secrets imbued with history and nature.

To the north, the towering peaks of the Julian Alps greet the traveller: the magnificent Triglav, the highest summit in the Balkans, surrounded by its companions Krn, Mangart, Jalovec, Kanin.... One must lift one's eyes toward the mountains and ask for strength to continue the journey.

Then one can lower them toward the two Gorizias, contemplating the bridges that unite their banks. Here ends the Goritian Way – or, rather, here it begins again – in the daily meanders of life, in the certainty that the search for roots, the suffering of wounds, and the immense joy of rebirth are part of the human experience of all and each of us. Happy journey, then – *ultrja y suseya*, always forward and always beyond....



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