



Grado and Aquileia

Town guide.



Grado, the Castrum *The history of Grado is closely interwoven with those of two famous towns: Aquileia and Venice: initially a maritime suburb of Roman Aquileia, Grado then became a shelter for the city of Aquileia, and finally, its enemy, while, on the other hand, it was the religious 'mother' of Venice, since Grado gave Venice its prestigious title of Patriarchate. The 5th and 6th centuries proved decisive, at a time when the continuous barbarian threats turned the suburb into a fortress, the castrum gradense, where the bishops fleeing from Aquileia took shelter and built marvellous churches, some of which have survived and are still centres of religious life. The elevations of the fortress walls have almost completely disappeared, though their impressive foundations are still visible. The late-Roman city can still be made out, however, in the historic centre, especially in the central campo dei Patriarchi, with its magnificent early-Christian buildings.*





Monuments and places of interest

Basilica di Sant'Eufemia

As the crucial historic monument in Grado, the Duomo (Basilica di S.Eufemia), is one of the most notable churches in the Triveneto area: previously preceded by a narthex, it was, for over eight centuries, the cathedral of a Patriarchate created in Aquileia and subsequently inherited by Venice, together with the cult of St. Mark the Evangelist, who received his first important recognition in Grado. Flanking the Duomo is the tall medieval bell tower, on whose top rises the so-called "Anzolo", the weathervane which has become the symbol of the town. In the solemn interior of the Duomo, now deprived of many of its



original furnishings, the harmonious architecture is highlighted by the calm rhythm of the colonnades and the elegant geometries of the magnificent floor mosaic bearing the names of Patriarch Elias and many other donors. Several works of art expound the fourteen centuries of the cathedral: the original Romanesque ambo with its Moresque cupola, the large Venetian silver altar-piece and the Gothic fresco representing Christ in heavenly glory in the apse.

Battistero

The austere octagonal architecture of the baptistery, dating back to the second half of the 6th century, rises north of the Duomo. Its well-lit, accurately restored interior shows some features of the original mosaic floor, divided into trapezoid wedges; some furnishings (such as the hexagonal basin, the small altar and the presbytery enclosure) were reintroduced during the restoration works. On the altar front, there is a remarkable slab with cross and birds, carrying Bishop Probino's monogram (569-571). In front of the Baptistry, two large 2nd and 3rd-century marble sarcophagi and other Roman finds (funeral altars of the 3rd century) are displayed.

Lapidario

Behind the Duomo, in a very narrow but picturesque setting, you can visit the Lapidario, with its hundreds of sculpture potsherds and epigraphs from the Grado excavations. Most exhibits date back to the early-Christian and early-Medieval periods (4th-9th centuries), though remarkable examples of classical Roman sculpture can be enjoyed as well, such as the two exquisite



sarcophagi facades (early 3rd century) and a magistrate's bust (early 4th century).

Santa Maria delle Grazie

The basilica of Santa Maria delle Grazie has been defined as "a most precious incunabulum of early-Christian architecture" thanks to its excellent level of preservation and the uniqueness of its internal apse plan, probably inspired by Syrian models. It dates back to the 5th century but was rebuilt towards the end of the 6th century, as testified by the floor mosaics laid on two different levels. Its soaring interior is enhanced by various 6th and 9th century sculptures.

Basilica della Corte

The foundations of a large three-aisled basilica (early 6th century), preceded to the west by an octagonal baptistery,

were brought to light in the large square in front of the Town Hall. The middle nave reveals mosaic fragments with votive inscriptions belonging to a previous single-naved church (late 4th-early 5th century). Access to the single-naved hall was granted through an atrium where four sarcophagi found on the excavation site are now located. Probably dedicated to St. John the Evangelist, the church was used as a cemetery. In the same square, (in the lobby of Hotel Fonzari) you can see the foundation of the south-east tower of the Castrum.

Grado Lagoon

An ideal landscape of the soul, the realm of poets and artists, a “microcosm” that induces “the slow, aimless roaming” (to use Claudio Magris’ words), searching for an eternal dimension that might only be found in timeless places such as this.



The lagoon is the magical, natural setting in which Grado was born and it probably represents the city’s truest nature: a maze of canals, myriad luxuriant islets and outcrops, whose colours are different at all times of the day and year. History has made its mark here, though it is difficult to make out in such a variable environment: traces of ancient roads and landings, traces of a hard, tiring life, of a faith that goes back to the origins of Christianity and finds symbolic continuity in the island of Barbana, one of the oldest and most visited sanctuaries dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Sacred Art

Together with other items of sacred art, the Tesoro del Duomo, including remarkable early-Christian and medieval silverware, will be exhibited in a museum of the Christian history of Grado.

Barbana

The soaring bell tower of the renowned Marian sanctuary is a beacon in the lagoon landscape. It is only a short trip to the green island of the Virgin Mary, the destination of pilgrimages in all seasons, and a peaceful oasis among memories of old.



Biagio Marin

There is almost no place in Grado that is not reminiscent of the name of Biagio Marin and his poetry. The house where the great poet was born in 1891 is located near the Santa Maria, and the house where he died in 1985 (close to the library dedicated to his beloved son Falco) faces the sea, the first and foremost inspiration of his poetry.

The golden island

Well-known as a seaside resort since the second half of the 19th century (Ippolito Nievo, the writer, was a famous pioneer), Grado was officially appointed as a therapy resort in 1892 by the creation of a Curatorio, a therapy centre. Within a few years, at the turn of the century,



thanks to the improved maritime links and the connection to the international railway system, dozens of hotels, pensioni and accommodation facilities were created, thus turning the isolated fishing village into the most popular seaside resort in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and into a highly regarded sea-water spa.





Even after profound political changes, the city of Grado has managed to retain its important tourist appeal, thanks also to its historical and environmental uniqueness in the Adriatic area, while at the same time improving and diversifying its offer so as to be abreast with the times.

So much so that the laudatory title of “golden island” coined by poet Biagio Marin has never been usurped.

Walks and excursions

Among its many assets, Grado also boasts a large pedestrian area covering the whole of the historic centre and most of the

modern city close to the beach. Its peculiar insular nature and its enviable geographical position make the city the ideal location for walks and excursions, both in the lagoon and the close hinterland. The already wide network of cycle paths is to be developed to reach the historic cities of Aquileia and Palmanova.





Aquileia



Museo Archeologico Nazionale and Epigraphic Rooms

Regarded as one of the major archaeological museums in Northern Italy, it was opened in 1882 in the Austrian-style Villa Cassis Faraone, along the main road leading to Grado, surrounded by a garden of luxuriant centenary trees. The museum displays exhibits from Aquileia and its immediate surroundings (see the Roman ship from Monfalcone). All the exhibits, most of which are of funerary origin, are carefully arrayed and date back to the Roman Age (from 2nd century BC to 5th century AD). There are a remarkable number of exhibits dating back to the first two centuries of the Empire, when,

from Augustus onwards, Aquileia was an important trading centre on the Mediterranean.

The most typical collections are the carved gems, the glass and amber works, as well as the epigraphic collections. Special mention must be made of the considerable number and remarkable quality of the mosaic floors the museum hosts, which were found both in private and public buildings.

Ground floor

On the ground floor the most important exhibits from both an historical and artistic point of view are the bas-relief representing the foundation of the city, together with the

realistic portraits of private citizens, the statues from the Julius and Claudius ages and the sepulchral representations of crafts. Of interest too are the religious exhibits, whose variety confirms that religious diversity was generally tolerated in Aquileia.

First floor

The magnificent Early Christian bronze chandelier in the first floor passageway resumes the religious theme.



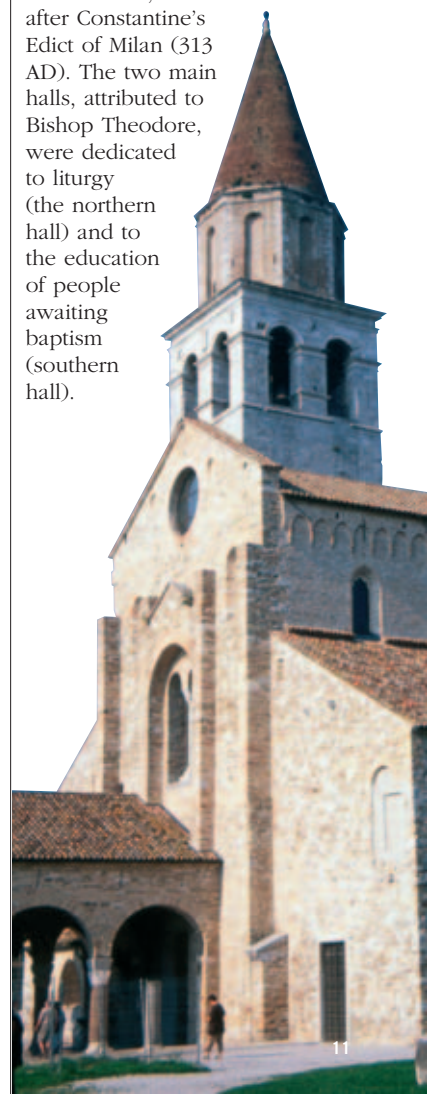
The adjoining room is, however, the pride of the museum for the quality and quantity of its collet carved gems, as is the room of blown, cut and molten glassware. The beautiful exhibition of ceramic and metal ware provides a cross-section of everyday life objects.

Second floor

The cutting of amber (a fossil resin from the Baltic area, thought to have special virtues) was one of the most renowned in Aquileia, thanks to its production of exquisite rings, pendants, spindles and amulets. The same room displays various items of jewellery, the bronze head of an emperor dating back to the 3rd century and an appliqué portraying the head of a wind deity of Hellenistic tradition. The numismatic section is rich and complete.

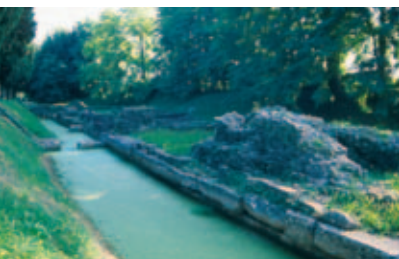
The Basilica

Silhouetted against the sky with its powerful bell tower (73m high), the pagan church and the baptistery, the Basilica offers a solemn view in Piazza Capitolo, further highlighted by its Gothic-Romanesque exposed face walls, which date back to the restorations made by Patriarchs Poppone (1019-1042) and Marquardo (1365-1381). Inside the Basilica, you can see one of the most extraordinary mosaic floors in the world, made after Constantine's Edict of Milan (313 AD). The two main halls, attributed to Bishop Theodore, were dedicated to liturgy (the northern hall) and to the education of people awaiting baptism (southern hall).





of Early Christian and early-Medieval epigraphs and other finds. However, what makes the exhibition spectacular is the chance visitors have of seeing the whole mosaic floor, rich in donors' votive inscriptions, from



Both halls communicated with other side halls. Meditation on the symbols represented in the Basilica, some of which are difficult to interpret and others which may not be of Christian origin (Gnostic, Judean-Christian?), was a powerful interior incentive for those who embraced a new religious faith as adults, reinforcing them in their choice.

The Museo Paleocristiano di Monastero

It is located in a large, former farm barn partly built on the remains of a late 4th century Early Christian Basilica (?), which had been transformed into the church of the adjoining Benedictine monastery. Inside there is an important display

the height of two large balconies.

The two splendid figurative parts (peacock, lambs and grapevines) coming from the ambulatory of the Basilica of Beligna (5th century) can also be seen from here.

Foro

The forum of Aquileia (115m x 57m) has an elongated shape. It is now visible in its 1936 reconstruction, which reflects its ancient structure. The remarkable colonnade used to support a portico which was lined with shops and service rooms. The plinths with Medusa heads or Jupiter Ammon and the illustrated screens express late 2nd century taste. The Roman forum was a natural meeting-place for conducting business, discussing politics and administering justice.

River port and Cal excavations

East of the city, where the 48m-wide River Natisone-Torre, navigable for 10km, once flowed, there are still large docks visible: more than 300m long, built in Istrian stone, with a double loading wharf, ramps for warehouses and gates to the city.

Here goods (food, spices, wood, marble, gems) arrived from throughout the Mediterranean, both for domestic use and destined for marketplaces in the Danube area.

West of the Basilica, there is an area enhancing a small part of the ancient city, inhabited from the first empire up to the 4th-5th century.

Cossar Excavations, Cemetery, Mausoleum

Cossar excavations dug up some of the finest mosaics in Aquileia (Europe riding the bull, the Asaraton (unswept floor) bow with vine and ivy branch), which are now displayed in the museum. Rich private houses were built during the Augustan Age, upon which dwellings with apses, deemed by some to be Christian oratories, were superimposed in the 4th century



(see Fishing scene and the Good Shepherd with peculiar robe). Cemeteries were located outside the city along the roads, such as the one in Via Annia. The Great Mausoleum in the suburban area is one of the most sumptuous examples of monumental tombs (1st century AD).

Donizetti Museo Scuola

In the historic centre, on the third floor of an ancient Aquileian house, the Donizetti Museum is a starting point for reflection and analysis of the innovative style, though immersed in the Italian great artistic tradition, of the well-known artist's paintings and other works.

Pinacoteca Civica

This picture gallery houses one of the most complete permanent exhibitions of the master Emilio Culiati, the creator of material-formal painting and the Aquileia School "Terrestrità locale".

Permanent exhibition "Aquileia crocevia dell'Impero Romano"

Located in front of the FVG Tourist information office, this permanent exhibition offers a vast panorama of the history of Aquileia.



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Grado e Aquileia

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