

CAVES AND MINES

A JOURNEY THROUGH GEOLOGY, HISTORY AND UNDERGROUND LANDSCAPES

IO SONO
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VENEZIA
GIULIA

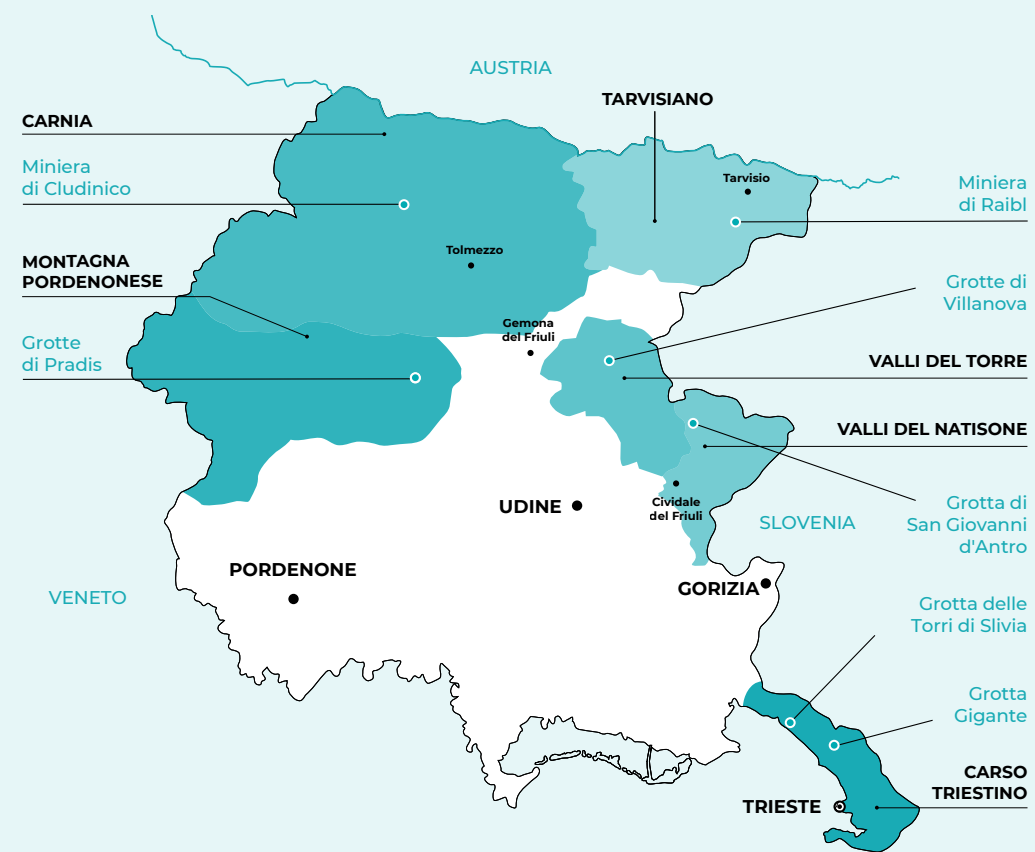
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EXPLORE THE REGION, LIVE THE EXPERIENCE

Caves and mines reveal the enduring dialogue between the outward face of a land and its innermost soul. From the depths of the earth, the story rises to the surface, where places and people preserve its memory.

In these pages you will find ideas and inspiration to build your own itinerary and plan the perfect day, with landscapes to discover and experiences to enjoy.



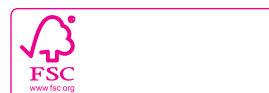
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TORRE VALLEYS

Untamed nature and boundless horizons reveal the authentic character of the Torre Valleys/ Terske Doline. Crystal-clear waters, karst streams and spectacular waterfalls, such as the Rio Boncic, shape enchanting landscapes. From the summit of Gran Monte, the view stretches across the plains and towards the Adriatic Sea. Trails winding through precious wildflowers and alpine wildlife offer opportunities for outdoor experiences and adventures in every season.

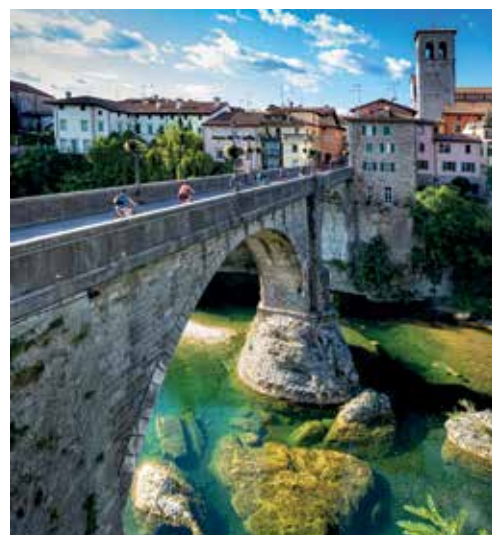
Here, the **Grotta Nuova di Villanova** and the **Geological Trail** offer a fascinating way to discover the area, with a route accessible to everyone that combines scientific education with nature.

From Pian dei Ciclamini, the **Percorso Fuori** begins: a circular trail through the woodlands of the Upper Torre Valley, also ideal for families. The journey continues with the **Ethnographic Museum** and the **Roman Bridge of Pers** in Lusevera, both offering a glimpse into the area's history, culture and local traditions.

NATISONE VALLEYS

The Natisone Valleys / Nediške Doline enchant visitors with lush forests of ash, chestnut, hazel, lime and hornbeam trees, along with colourful blooms and landscapes that change in colour and fragrance with every step. Here, land is home to a rich variety of wildlife, while a vibrant local culture lives on through ancient traditions, rituals and popular festivals. This authentic area can be explored and experienced along themed trails, visiting votive chapels and sites connected with the First World War, making it an ideal destination for trekking and caving enthusiasts. Against this beautiful backdrop, the **Cave of San Giovanni d'Antro** opens the way to an area rich in nature trails. Nearby stands **Mount Matajur**, one of the symbols of the valleys, whose summit offers breathtaking views stretching across the Friulian plain.

Just a short distance away, **Cividale del Friuli**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a treasure trove of art, history and culture. Once the capital of the Lombard Duchy, the town invites visitors to wander through the streets of its historic centre. From the contemporary art of Palazzo de Nordis to remarkable vestiges of the past, such as the evocative Monastery of Santa Maria in Valle and its Lombard Temple, the treasures housed in the National Archaeological Museum, and the Devil's Bridge spanning the Natisone River.



TRIESTE KARST

A borderland shaped by water and time, where rock meets the sea. The Trieste Karst is a rocky plateau overlooking the Adriatic Sea, extending inland among cliffs, woodlands and sinkholes. Its scenic trails preserve traces of history attracting many notable figures. Poets, travellers and writers have crossed these landscapes, drawing inspiration from a territory that gave its name to the phenomenon of karst and contributed to the development of its scientific study.

A visit to the **Grotta Gigante** or the **Torri di Silvia Cave** can be the starting point for an itinerary combining nature, history and spectacular views over the Gulf of Trieste. From the Grotta Gigante, you can reach the **Carsiana Botanical Garden**, a treasure trove of Karst flora, or climb to the **Opicina Obelisk**, from where one of the most evocative views over the city of Trieste unfolds. Just a short distance away, **Miramare Castle** offers one of the most iconic experiences in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

Continuing towards Duino Aurisina, the Torri di Silvia Cave lies within a landscape rich in natural and historical legacy. Nearby, you can follow the renowned **Rilke Trail**, overlooking cliffs rising sheer above the sea, visit the **Timavo Springs**, the **Church of San Giovanni in Tuba** and the **Mithraeum cave**, and end the day at **Duino Castle** and the Bay of Sistiana.



TARVISIO AREA

Located in Italy's far north-east, the Tarvisiano is a land stretching between the Carnic and Julian Alps, offering a perfect blend of nature, history and traditions.

Amid the majestic mountains of Friuli, the **Raibl Mine** in Cave del Predil offers visitors the chance to discover a land where the rock conceals stories from deep underground. For centuries, these tunnels were home to one of Europe's most important mining centres, contributing to the economic and cultural development of an area now surrounded by a landscape of



extraordinary beauty. The journey into the depths of the Raibl Mine continues above ground at the **Museum of Mining Heritage**, where memories and traditional knowledge have been preserved. Just a few minutes away, **Lake Predil (also known as Lake Raibl)** lies nestled among the mountains, reflecting the colours of the Alps.

Tarvisio welcomes visitors with its multicultural spirit, shaped by its location between Italy, Austria and Slovenia, and is the ideal starting point for exploring the wild and authentic landscapes of these border mountains. The **Tarvisio Forest**, one of Italy's most valuable natural areas, has more than a thousand years of history and is the largest state-owned forest in Italy. Among fir trees and native species, it is home to a rich variety of alpine wildlife and to the renowned "resonance spruce", whose wood is used to make stringed musical instruments.

Completing this evocative itinerary is **Mount Lussari**, a place of great symbolic and scenic importance, famous for its ancient sanctuary and its role as a historic crossroads of cultures.



PORDENONE MOUNTAINS

Between the Carnic Alps and the Friulian plain, the Pordenone Mountains offer a harmonious blend of the power of nature and the allure of history. Peaks, trails, woodlands and lakes invite visitors to discover unspoiled landscapes, while peaceful villages preserve the traditions and stories of communities that have lived in and cherished these lands for centuries.

Guardians of a unique archaeological identity, the **Pradis Caves** and **Cave Museum** lead visitors into the timeless charisma of a natural site where traces of prehistoric life meet the enduring, patient work of water.

From here, an itinerary unfolds through Clauzetto, also known as the "**Balcony of Friuli**" thanks to its spectacular views over the plain below; the medieval village of **Toppo**, with its castle; and **Sequals**, home to **Villa Carnera**, dedicated to the renowned Friulian boxing champion Primo Carnera.

CARNIA

An ancient land in the north-western part of Friuli Venezia Giulia, where the mountains express their most authentic character. The unspoiled landscapes of the Carnic Alps and the Friulian Dolomites, part of the UNESCO World Heritage, are home to forests, crystal-clear waters and majestic peaks to be explored through hiking trails, routes connecting mountain huts and alpine refuges, and a wide range of outdoor activities. From Roman remains to the fortifications of the First World War, the history of Carnia is intertwined with the age-old knowledge of traditional crafts and local customs. The Val Degano, one of its most authentic valleys, preserves traces of ancient trades and a community deeply rooted in its mountain heritage.

The **Cludinico Mine**, a symbol of the valley's history, tells the story of coal mining and the lives of the miners. Alongside this mining site, the valley celebrates woodworking, traditional crafts and the flavours of traditional Carnic cuisine. **Ovaro** is an ideal starting point for exploring the area, from the **Parish Church of Santa Maria di Gorto** to the trails leading to **Col Gentile**, **Monte Arvenis** and **Monte Zoncolan**.



THE CAVER'S LEXICON

Chamber

A large underground space created by the natural evolution of a cave, often on a grand scale and rich in formations.

Contact cave

A cavity that develops where two types of rock with different characteristics meet, and where water finds a natural route underground.

Doline

From the Slovenian word for "valley", a natural hollow in the ground, typical of karst landscapes, formed by the dissolving of limestone or by the collapse of underground cavities.

Flowstone

Rock surfaces covered by thin deposits of calcite, shaped over time by the slow trickle of water.

Gorge

A deep ravine cut over time by the erosive action of a stream between rock walls that are often very steep.

Karstification

The natural process by which soluble rock, especially limestone, is gradually dissolved by water, forming caves, dolines, swallow holes and underground rivers.

Speleology

The discipline that studies natural cavities from a geological, biological and environmental point of view, and also includes their exploration.

Speleothems

Mineral formations created by the slow deposition of calcium carbonate carried by water. They include stalactites, stalagmites, columns and flowstone.

Stalactites

Formations that grow downwards from the roof of a cave through the slow deposition of calcium carbonate carried by drops of water.

Stalagmites

Formations that build up on the floor of a cave, growing upwards from the drops falling from the roof.



LOOK BEYOND THE SURFACE: THE SOUL OF THIS LAND BEATS BENEATH YOUR FEET

*Friuli Venezia Giulia has an exceptionally rich geological heritage, among the most important in Europe, with over 8,700 cavities recorded in the **Regional Cave Register**, kept constantly up to date thanks to the research and monitoring work of the Region's Geological Service and caving associations.*

Among the recorded caves, seven tourist sites reveal strikingly different underground worlds: vast karst caves, natural gorges, places of worship, historic mines and routes that tell of millions of years of the Earth's as well as the enduring relationship between humankind and the mountains.



GROTTA GIGANTE

Deep beneath the Karst lies an extraordinary place where, over thousands of years, nature has created a timeless wonder: the **Grotta Gigante**. An enchanting journey into the marvels of the underground leads to the Grande Caverna, the vast chamber that earned Grotta Gigante its place in the Guinness World Records in 1995 as the world's largest single-chamber tourist cave. Accompanied by expert guides, you can enjoy an unforgettable experience among spectacular stalactites, imposing stalagmites and striking underground landscapes, discovering hidden and surprising corners along the way. The route reaches the Belvedere terrace, suspended above the sheer scale of the cave, with a view like no other. A thrilling adventure into the magic of nature, more than 100 metres below the surface of the Earth.

- ⌚ Duration: about 1 hour
- 👤 Route: guided tour along 850 m
- 🏠 Environment: 500 steps down and 500 back up
- 🌡️ Inside temperature: constant 11 °C
- 👕 Recommended clothing: fleece or light jacket, closed shoes with non-slip soles
- 🏛️ Scientific Speleological Museum

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TORRI DI SLIVIA CAVE/ PEJCA V LAZCU

The Trieste Karst has more surprises in store with the **Torri di Slivia Cave**, a protected karst cavity 113 metres above sea level and 101 metres deep. Considered one of the wonders of the Karst for the extraordinary richness of its formations, it holds imposing stone sculptures, foremost among them the famous eight towers of Slivia, up to 8 metres high, which give the cave its name. Today the experience takes visitors down 200 steps to the heart of the cavity with expert guides, and a memorable ride on the Agribus. A secret door in the surrounding woods opens onto a hidden world, where the Earth's history unfolds alongside protected species that reveal the fragile balance of life underground.

- ⌚ Duration: 75 minutes
- 👤 Route: guided tour descending to 60 m
- 🏠 Environment: 200 steps down and 200 steps back up
- 🌡️ Inside temperature: 6 - 9 °C
- 👕 Recommended clothing: fleece and trainers or hiking shoes with non-slip soles
- 🚗 Agribus, the distinctive tractor and trailer that takes visitors to the cave entrance

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PRADIS CAVES

Set in the Pordenone Mountains, the **Pradis Caves** preserve a remarkable heritage where nature, history and spirituality meet. A spectacular adventure leads to the gorge carved over millennia by the Cosa stream, a true open-air geological atlas. After descending the 207 steps into the Orrido, visitors reach an evocative setting where the wooden Crucifix by Maestro Gatto of Treviso welcomes them. A place of worship and devotion to Our Lady of the Caves, the site also holds important prehistoric evidence: Neanderthals and groups of hunter-gatherers left traces of their presence here. The Pradis Caves Museum completes the visit with archaeological and palaeontological finds that recount the millennia-old history of this fascinating place.

- ⌚ Duration: 1 - 1.5 hours
- 👤 Route: self-guided or with expert guides
- 🏠 Environment: route along the natural gorge
- 🌡️ Inside temperature: 10 - 12 °C
- 👕 Recommended clothing: comfortable clothes, fleece and hiking shoes or shoes with good grip
- 🏛️ Cave Museum

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GROTTA NUOVA DI VILLANOVA

A cave unique for its origins and for the sheer scale of its spaces. The **Grotta Nuova di Villanova** is the largest contact cave open to visitors in Europe, formed where two different types of rock meet. A striking route runs through galleries sculpted by time and shaped by an underground stream, winding for almost 9 km among vast chambers, spectacular canyons and settings that change shape at every turn. Stalactites, stalagmites, flowstone like sheets of white water and delicate eccentric formations create scenes that defy gravity and the imagination. A journey into the silence of the Earth, where the purity of the air makes the experience even more special, in a place like no other to explore and enjoy.

- ⌚ Duration: 1 - 1.5 hours
- 👤 Route: guided tour with expert guides
- 🏠 Environment: karst cavity with stalactites and flowstone
- 🌡️ Inside temperature: constant 11 °C
- 👕 Recommended clothing: jacket and hiking boots or shoes
- 🏛️ Villanova delle Grotte Geological Trail, a circular walking route for everyone

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SAN GIOVANNI D'ANTRO CAVE/LANDARSKA JAMA

The **Cave Church of San Giovanni d'Antro**, in the Natisone Valleys, is a place where history, art, spirituality and nature have been interwoven for over five thousand years. It is reached along a path of about 500 metres and a dramatic stone stairway of 86 steps. Used since the Neolithic period, and later serving as a Roman stronghold and a refuge during the barbarian invasions, it became a Christian place of worship between the 5th and 8th centuries. The cavity holds the Lombard loggia, the late Gothic chapel, a precious Baroque wooden altar and frescoes rich in symbols left by the cultures that have passed through this borderland. The visitor route runs for about 300 metres inside the cave, among spectacular formations shaped by water.

- ⌚ Duration: about 1 hour
- 👤 Route: guided tour, about 600 m round trip
- 🏠 Environment: cave sanctuary
- 🌡️ Inside temperature: constant 11 °C
- 👕 Recommended clothing: suitable for a damp environment, fleece, non-slip shoes. Helmet provided at the entrance
- 🏛️ Late Gothic rock church, built inside the natural cavity



The legend of Queen Vida adds another layer to the experience: she is said to have taken refuge here to escape Attila and save her people from the siege of the Huns.

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RAIBL MINE

For centuries the **Raibl Mine** at Cave del Predil was one of Europe's most important lead and zinc mines, shaping the history and identity of this land. Today, the International Geo-mining Park preserves this extraordinary heritage, making it a place of discovery, memory and knowledge. Aboard an electric train, you travel through the old tunnels, where minerals, extraction techniques and life stories bring the daily reality of generations of miners to life. The visit continues with the Museum of Mining Tradition and the workers' village of Cave del Predil, both valuable reminders of a community that grew up around the mine. Among mountains, woods and Lake Predil, striking alpine scenery meets a mining history that still resonates today.

- ⌚ Duration: 1 - 1.5 hours
- 👤 Route: guided tour aboard a mine train
- 🏠 Environment: alpine mine tunnels
- 🌡️ Inside temperature: 6 - 8 °C
- 👕 Recommended clothing: warm clothing, waterproof jacket and closed shoes with non-slip soles
- 🏛️ Museum of Mining Tradition

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CLUDINICO MINE

The **Cludinico Mine**, in the municipality of Ovaro, preserves the memory of the region's principal coal-mining site. With over 150 km of tunnels and three extraction sites – Creta d'Oro, Varetton and Rio Malon – it shaped the life of an entire mining village, until extraction came to an end in the late 1950s. Today, thanks to careful restoration, about 1 km of the Creta d'Oro tunnels can be explored with expert guides. Among lit passages, traces of the miners' work and surprising natural formations, the route offers a journey back in time into the secrets of the underground. The visit begins at the museum, housed in the former mine warehouse, where finds and personal accounts tell the story of a community bound to the mine.

- ⌚ Duration: up to 3 hours
- 👤 Route: guided tour with expert guides
- 🏠 Environment: authentic mine tunnels
- 🌡️ Inside temperature: 15 °C
- 👕 Recommended clothing: hiking boots and a lightweight waterproof jacket
- 🏛️ Museum of the Former Cludinico Coal Mine

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