

Via Claudia Augusta





"As part of the inter-territorial cooperation project, "In the footsteps of the ancient Via Claudia Augusta between tourism and culture", several initiatives were carried out in the Valsugana and Feltrino areas. The project is part of the 2014-2020 LEADER programme and is funded by the Local Action Group "GAL Prealpi e Dolomiti" in collaboration with "GAL Trentino Orientale".

In particular, measures were implemented to strengthen and improve the infrastructure for sustainable tourism, with a focus on places characterised by impressive natural beauty and landscapes. These locations include upper part of Valsugana and lower part of Valsugana, the Tesino plateau, the municipality of Fonzaso, the municipality of Borgo Valbelluna, and the municipality of Lamon (as part of the T.I. 7.5.1 action).

At the same time, measures to restore the architectural heritage were realised in the municipality of Feltre (as part of T.I. 7.6.1). The aim of these measures was to enhance the historical and cultural value of these places and thus contribute to preserving their memory and promoting awareness of them among residents and visitors.

The co-operation project therefore aims to promote the Via Claudia Augusta tourist route, in line with previous initiatives, as well as involving the sites involved, and in line with the objectives of the EEG Via Claudia Augusta at a transnational level.

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The Claudia Augusta is the name of the ancient imperial road that led from Altino via Veneto, Trentino-Alto Adige, Tyrol and Bavaria to the Danube and can therefore be regarded as the “Venice-Munich” link of Roman times.

The Via Claudia Augusta is one of the most important roads built by the Romans in northern Italy. In contrast to the Via Postumia, the Via Popilia, the Via Annia and other roads that run exclusively in the Po Valley, it is, like some other roads in the Alps, a road of clear “transalpine” importance, which was intended to connect the area of the Po Valley with the Roman conquests beyond the Alps.

More precisely, the road seems to have been established to connect eastern Padania with the Roman frontiers, which at that time extended as far as the Danube, a deep and grandiose waterway that represented a powerful bulwark and a practical natural border between the Roman Empire and the territories inhabited by Germanic tribes.

The old Roman road, which led from the Adriatic and the Po Valley across the Alps to the Danube, is today, after 2000 years, experiencing a new heyday. It is not just a great piece of history that the neighbouring towns and cities have in common, or a successful tourist route but it is a piece of identity and is experienced by the population as an axis of encounter, exchange and co-operation.

The Via Claudia Augusta is the only Roman road that is documented with two milestones: one in Rabland (South Tyrol) and one in Cesiomaggiore near Feltre (Veneto). The two milestones state the name of the road, the date of its construction, the arrival and departure points in the north and south, the course of the road, the client and - somewhat unusually - the “builder”.

In both cases, it was Emperor Claudius Augustus, who obviously wanted to make a name for himself among his subjects and immortalise himself for posterity. The function of these two monuments of honour was primarily of a ceremonial nature: they were intended to underline the imperial concept of the road itself as a link between the upper Adriatic and Central Europe, between the Po Valley and the Danube Plain, between Italy and Raetia.





Its route, which still exists in part and was surveyed photographically before the agricultural revolution is clearly recognisable at its southern end, just outside the city limits of old Altino.

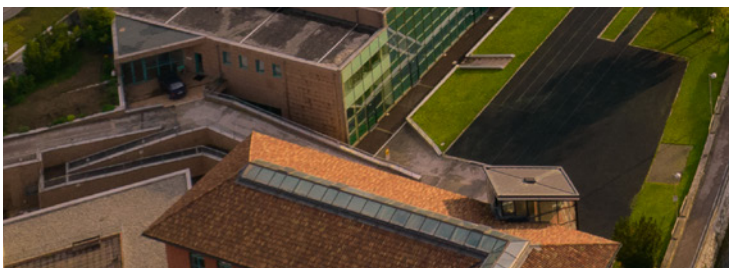
Via Claudia Augusta is now the name for the project idea. The old imperial road will be upgraded to a European, historical-ecological route, which will promote tourism and economic development in the areas it crosses.

This project reimagines the route of memory, presenting it as a symbol of unity and dissemination between the different cultures and ideas of the various countries of Europe, because communication has always promoted knowledge and development.

The ancient road axis of the Via Claudia Augusta was for centuries one of the most important transport routes across the Alps, from the Adriatic to the Danube.

The Via Claudia Augusta crosses areas where art, history and nature meet, with rural and mountainous landscapes of rare beauty, and must therefore be the connecting element between the various areas crossed, to create a complete tourist route with a historical-ecological character, offering various possibilities from the Adriatic to the Danube.

The project is attractive and should be pursued, firstly because it proposes beautiful but little-known areas and places, but also because it is about rediscovering history and initiating high-quality cultural tourism.



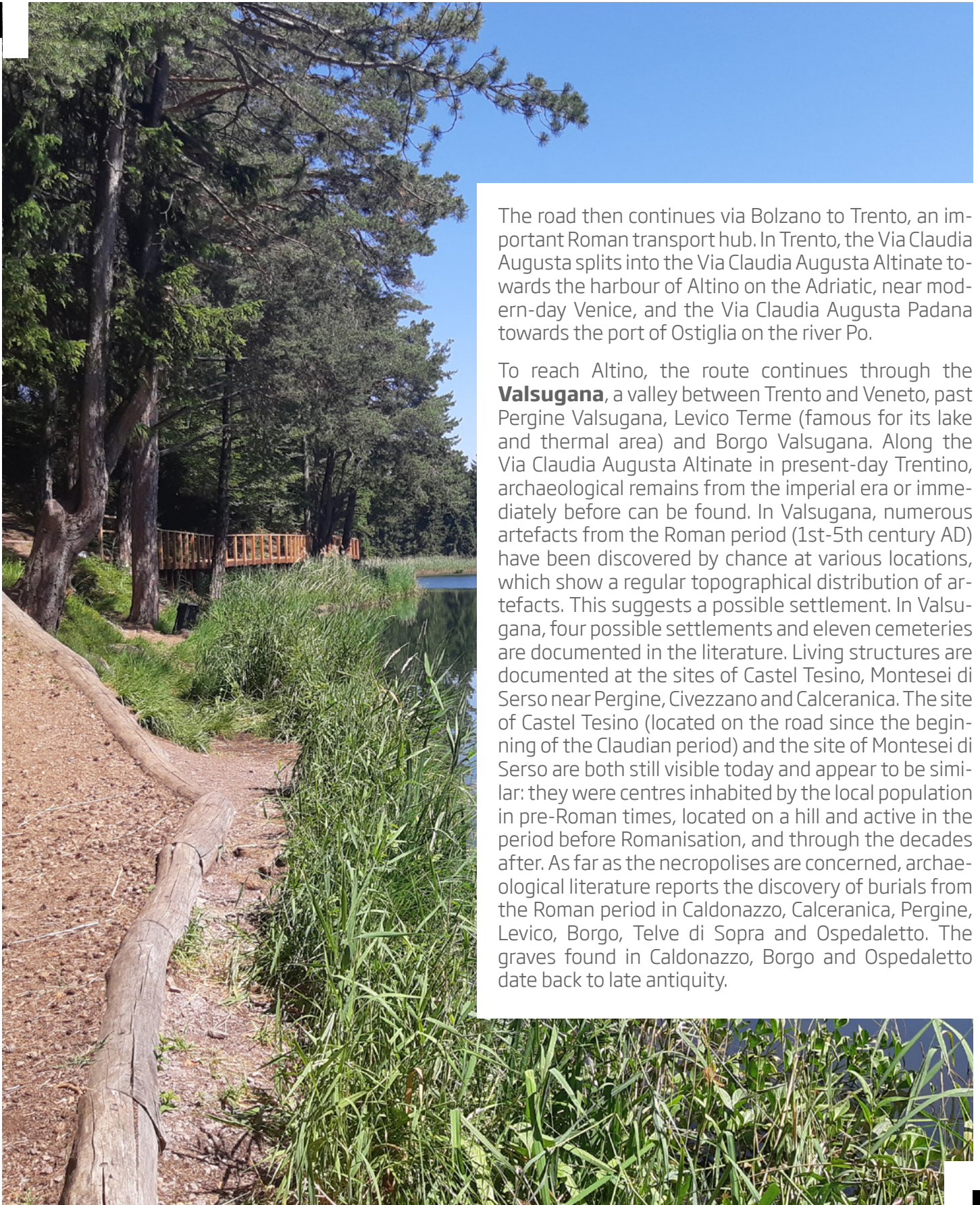


The basic idea must be to reinvent, or rather reconstruct, traditions by rediscovering an important past and bringing it into the present and the modern age.

Originally the Via Claudia Augusta ran from Altino to the Danube, today it runs in the opposite direction, i.e. from Donauwörth to Altino (Venice).

The route leads through Bavaria and Tyrol before arriving at the Reschen Pass in Trentino-South Tyrol. At 1507 metres, this is the highest point of the Via Claudia Augusta, which reaches its peak on Italian territory. A little further north, in the Austrian town of Nauders, was the only documented Roman stop in Tyrol, Inutrium. Today, numerous holidaymakers stop off in the upper part of the valley. In winter and summer, they enjoy the mountain world around Nauders, Reschen, Curon and St. Valentin. The four villages belong to two different provinces and tourist regions, but geographically they are all part of the Venosta Valley. Guests also appreciate the lakes that have been created on the pass by reservoirs. Lake Reschen with the bell tower of Curon vecchia is one of the most photographed motifs on the route.





The road then continues via Bolzano to Trento, an important Roman transport hub. In Trento, the Via Claudia Augusta splits into the Via Claudia Augusta Altinate towards the harbour of Altino on the Adriatic, near modern-day Venice, and the Via Claudia Augusta Padana towards the port of Ostiglia on the river Po.

To reach Altino, the route continues through the **Valsugana**, a valley between Trento and Veneto, past Pergine Valsugana, Levico Terme (famous for its lake and thermal area) and Borgo Valsugana. Along the Via Claudia Augusta Altinate in present-day Trentino, archaeological remains from the imperial era or immediately before can be found. In Valsugana, numerous artefacts from the Roman period (1st-5th century AD) have been discovered by chance at various locations, which show a regular topographical distribution of artefacts. This suggests a possible settlement. In Valsugana, four possible settlements and eleven cemeteries are documented in the literature. Living structures are documented at the sites of Castel Tesino, Montesei di Serso near Pergine, Civezzano and Calceranica. The site of Castel Tesino (located on the road since the beginning of the Claudian period) and the site of Montesei di Serso are both still visible today and appear to be similar: they were centres inhabited by the local population in pre-Roman times, located on a hill and active in the period before Romanisation, and through the decades after. As far as the necropolises are concerned, archaeological literature reports the discovery of burials from the Roman period in Caldonazzo, Calceranica, Pergine, Levico, Borgo, Telve di Sopra and Ospedaletto. The graves found in Caldonazzo, Borgo and Ospedaletto date back to late antiquity.



The Via Claudia Augusta crosses the entire Valsugana, starting in Civezzano, passing through Castel Ivano and reaching the Tesino plateau.

In Civezzano, you can visit the **Ecomuseo Argentario**, a cultural project that places the region's heritage at the centre of its activities. The area covered by the Ecomuseum includes the Monte Calisio plateau and its surroundings.

The Argentario Ecomuseum was found to preserve the traces of medieval mining and today focuses on valuing the numerous and varied riches of this area: from the ancient mines to the local quarries, from the natural beauties to the traces of the First World War, from the small villages to the ancient crafts and local agricultural products.

The route continues through Pergine Valsugana to Calceranica al Lago with the medieval church of San Emete, the oldest in Valsugana, inside which there is an altar dedicated to Diana (2nd century AD); the inscribed text of the monument indicates the presence of funds from wealthy people from the municipality of Feltre.

Immediately after Calceranica is Caldonazzo with the parish church of San Sisto.

It was mentioned in 1345 in an acquittal for a crime of usury, depended on the Pieve di Calceranica and was rebuilt in the 18th century.

On one wall are the tombstones of Osvaldo Trapp and Maria Anna Thun (1641) with their respective coats of arms and of Sebastiano Carlo Trapp, a canon. The two large fragments of the Christian tombstone from the 6th century, which were found on the Brenta hill in 1872, were brought here in 1976. The organ, housed in a beautiful Empire case, is the definitive work of the Serassi brothers from Bergamo and the only organ remaining in Trentino from this famous family of organ builders. A painting of the Nativity by Eugenio Prati is part of the church's heritage.

Further evidence of the Via Claudia Augusta Altinate can be found in Tenna Valsugana, a village in a marvellous panoramic position between the lakes of Levico and Caldonazzo.



This was significant and important position for the exposure and possible preparation of watchtowers, defence, and barriers. It was most probably already frequented in prehistoric times, albeit sparsely, as evidenced by some finds in Castelar (bronze axe) and Alberé (flint hump).

One of the most fascinating buildings in the Tenna area is the **Austro-Hungarian fort**, which was built between 1880 and 1882. Together with the Col delle Benne fortress, it formed an element of control over the Valsugana and was strategically linked to the fortifications at Lavarone and Altipiano di Vezzena.

Tenna, however, is better known because the archaeologist Paolo Orsi found a Roman milestone with the number XXXXI [M(ilia) p(assum)] in the parish church in 1876.

The route continues to **Levico Terme**, where in 1858 the only sarcophagus in the valley was found, dating back to the Middle and Late Imperial period, along with other tombs made of opus caementicium, stones and tiles. Today, the sarcophagus, which is decorated with cultic bas-reliefs, is located in Levico Terme in the gardens of Via Marconi in a pavilion equipped to display it appropriately.

From Levico, the route continues to the picturesque district of Selva, from where it descends to the valley floor. The route follows the river Brenta as far as Marter before passing through the second spa town in Valsugana, Roncegno Terme. From there, with a view of Castel Telvana, the route leads through green and flowering meadows towards Borgo, the main town of Media and Bassa Valsugana. The road through the historic centre corresponds to the Via Claudia Augusta. From Borgo, the route leads to Castelnuovo, from where there is a beautiful view of Castel Ivano. From the bottom of the valley, the route now gradually climbs up to the Tesino plateau, which repeatedly offers beautiful views of the Valsugana.

We reach **Castello Tesino**, an important place on the border with Veneto, where the Dosso di Sant'Ippolito is located.

The first reports of archaeological finds on the Dosso di S. Ippolito date back to 1862, when the new cemetery was laid out near the church of Sant'Ippolito. Local historians report the discovery of ancient artefacts (fibulae, consular coins, imperial coins, and a Greek coin) and traces of an ancient road, probably the Via Claudia Augusta.

Between 1977 and 1979, the area of Dosso di San Ippolito, a rocky outcrop on the north-western edge of the village of Castello Tesino, was the subject of archaeological excavations sponsored by the *Soprintendenza per i beni culturali-Ufficio beni archeologici della Provincia Autonoma di Trento*. The investigations revealed that, the distribution of the material found suggests the settlement covered the entire area of the hill as early as the mid-19th century. In addition to providing dates, the finds have enabled us to understand the commercial and controlling relations of the site, which were based on its important geographical position. Dosso is a fundamental site for understanding the transition from prehistory to Roman times.

From Valsugana, the Roman road leads up to the Tesino plateau, on the border between Trentino and Veneto; from here, the route winds along picturesque mountain roads to Lamon. In the village of Stalena, not far away, the remarkable complex of the "**Roman Bridge**" is in a natural setting of rare beauty and suggestive effect. Thanks to a refurbishment and restoration project, it offers visitors a reminder of times long past. At the height of the splendour of the imperial era, the men of the Roman legions passed through these places to reach the Germanic territories.

At the foot of Monte Avena runs a section of the Roman road from Fonzaso to the hamlet of **Arten**. There are several ancient capitals along the route that are still visited by the locals today.



The first tower is the "Chapel of the Holy Trinity" (an alcove in the wall with a canvas painting of the Holy Trinity in the background), a point of reference for the supplicatory processions of the past. Then we come to the chapel of the "Madonna delle scalette", a shrine located at the point where a path starts from the Via Romana towards the coast of Monte Avena.

At the last tower "San Nicolò", the sacellum (chapel) and the cloth date back to the 18th century.

Legend has it that the Fonzasini, who used to walk to the neighbourhoods of Arten in the evening to meet girls, encountered strange figures along the way. A tall, blood-red man, "El Sanguanel", barefoot and with his feet tipped backwards, came down from Monte Avena and stood in the middle of the vineyards directly above the road. As soon as they saw him, the poor boys ran away in fear. They didn't think he was a cheeky and mischievous ogre, but he also had good sides: Sometimes he liked to help some farmer, always at night, who then found all the work done in the early morning when he got up and went down to the stable.

The path then continues to the **Sovramonte plateau**, a wide plateau above the narrow valley that the Cison river has carved out over the millennia. The landscape you will see is gentle, the views are wide, and houses alternate with green meadows and cultivated fields. If you look for Sovramonte, you won't find an individual settlement named after it: it's a collection of small towns.

The Via Claudia Augusta leads across the plateau and then reaches the **Croce d'Aune** pass, where there is a monument to Tullio Campagnolo, the man who gave the bicycle wings. Campagnolo was a racing cyclist who realised after a race that something had to change in the bicycle. Designs, models, tests, experiments. The steel leans on his intuition, bends, shapes itself and on 8 February 1930 Campagnolo registered the first of 185 patents, all bearing his signature. He christened it with a funny name in rhyming form: Ruotismo for cycling.

In the snow on the Croce d'Aune pass, Tullio realised that screwing the hub on and off the frame was not the most practical solution. He then devised a solution to simplify and speed up wheel changes: He invented the quick release for bicycle hubs, which consisted of a cap to which a lever was attached to lock and unlock the mechanism. One movement was enough to open or close it. The quick release was Tullio Campagnolo's first major invention, which can still be seen today in the Campagnolo logo with the "winged wheel".

From the Croce d'Aune pass, the route takes a few bends down to the Feltre area. You reach this town steeped in history via Pedavena, whose factory invites you to enjoy a refreshing beer in Italy's largest brewery. In addition to the excellent beer, the **Pedavena brewery** also offers traditional dishes in its restaurant next to the factory, an ideal stop for travellers who want to take a break and enjoy the local delicacies.

The route then leads through the traffic-calmed main street of **Feltre** and along the medieval town walls. The town has developed over time and has preserved important archaeological evidence of the existence of an ancient settlement. The two main squares of Feltre, Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, and Piazza Maggiore are well worth a visit: the heart of the historic centre, dominated by the castle of Alboino and surrounded by Lombard fountains, the church of San Rocco and the palaces of Gazzi, Bovio-Da Romagno and Guarnieri. The discovery of a large, paved area connected to Piazza Maggiore leads to the site of the lighthouse complex, i.e. the political, economic and religious centre of the Roman city.

Walking through the streets of the centre, you can admire numerous frescoed facades of stately palaces. The Museo Civico, the "Carlo Rizzarda" Gallery of Modern Art and the Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art are certainly worth a visit. Outside the city walls, a visit to the cathedral and the archaeological area below the churchyard is a must.

The area around Feltre also included what is now Valsugana. Although the archaeological finds in Valsugana are still sparse, they confirm the existence of important settlements from early history, as well as an extensive settlement, especially from the first century AD.



The Ausugum road station mentioned in ancient sources is said to have been in Borgo Valsugana, while various archaeological finds have been made in Levico, Ospedaletto, Tenna (here too, a milestone confirms the route of the Roman road), Caldonazzo, Calceranica and Marter. They bear witness to a widespread settlement in an area characterised by good economic and environmental conditions, which facilitated trade and commerce along the Via Claudia Augusta and the other roads that crossed the area in Roman times.

Returning to the route, we pass the town of Feltre and come to another important stop: passing through picturesque villages, we reach **Cesiomaggiore**, where one of the two milestones of the Via Claudia Augusta was found. After its discovery, it was placed in the collection of ancient tombstones in Villa Tauro 'alle Centenere'. This Tauro family villa dates from the early 17th century. The villa was enriched above all by Francesco Tauro, who lived between 1700 and 1800 and collected works of art such as Cima di Conegliano, Giorgione and many others, including the lapidarium with the Via Claudia Augusta Altinate memorial stone. All that remains today is the milestone visible through a locked gate. Over the course of time, everything else has been scattered.

The Via Claudia Augusta Altinate milestone from 47 AD, which depicts the passage of the Roman militia, was found in Cesiomaggiore in 1786.

It is a popular destination for many tourists travelling along the Via Claudia Augusta. The column leads back to Cesiomaggiore, the main point of reference for the extensive scientific literature on the road.

Cesiomaggiore is also famous for being the town of cycling, where the main streets are named after famous cyclists. One of the best and most complete collections of historic bicycles in Italy can be found there at the **Bicycle Museum**. It includes Italian, French, and American models from the 19th and 20th centuries, the oldest dating back to 1791. The bicycles are organised by era and theme: Children's bicycles, work bicycles, war bicycles, tourist bicycles, racing bicycles...

Of course, the bicycles of the most famous Italian racing cyclists are also on display.





Another obligatory stop, also in Cesiomaggiore, is the **Ethnographic Museum of the Dolomites**. The museum is housed in the 19th-century Azzoni Avogadro country villa, located in a marvellous panoramic position at the foot of the Dolomiti Bellunesi National Park and surrounded by a rose garden. It preserves and gives value to an important tangible and intangible heritage that encompasses the most important aspects of rural life in an alpine and pre-alpine area. Of particular interest are the sections dealing with the mobility of the population (milkmaids emigration to Brazil at the end of the 19th century) and adaptation to a difficult environment. A special feature of the museum is its focus on intangible heritage (tales, legends, sounds, testimonies), which is achieved through the use of different media (sound, image, text). The museum has a specialised library, a photo and film archive, and a sound archive. The heritage is gains importance through intensive educational activities and numerous scientific and recreational initiatives.



The Roman Road once crossed the Piave with a ford between Santa Giustina and the hamlet of Nave in the municipality of Borgo Valbelluna, as the name "Nave" (boat) indicates. Where the route crosses the river today, between Busche and Cesana, there may also have been a crossing in Roman times. After crossing the river, you have to decide whether you want to cross the picturesque Praderadego Pass under your own steam, as the Romans once did, or by shuttle. From Corte, a detour takes you to the **municipality of Mel**, one of the most beautiful villages in Italy. The shuttle runs from the village square to the pass. Mel is one of the most beautiful historic centres in the province of Belluno and a village with the Orange Flag of the Italian Touring Club and was included in the list of the most beautiful villages in Italy in 2017. It is located on a hill halfway between Belluno and Feltre, on the left bank of the river Piave. A visit to Mel is worthwhile, both to soak up the Venetian atmosphere in the centre of the historic village and to explore the surrounding area: Grotta Azzurra, Zumelle Castle, Nordic walking trails.

Zumelle Castle stands on a hill overlooking the river Terche. The first nucleus of a fortified castle in Zumelle probably dates back to the 1st century AD, when the Romans consolidated their influence over Valbelluna. The building probably stood on the site where the main core of the castle is located today, in a strategic position for monitoring transit on the Via Claudia Augusta Altinate (or one of its variants). During the barbarian invasions, the castle became the centre of the local defence system before it was heavily destroyed and could no longer be used. Zumelle Castle is the best-preserved castle in the entire Valbelluna. Only the peripheral fortifications have been completely destroyed. The central core with its walls and tower is surrounded by a deep moat carved into the rock. Access to the castle and the small inner courtyard is via a road that leads up the slope. The 36 metre high tower has a square floor plan and five storeys connected by a wooden staircase. On the north side of the walls is an old church dedicated to St Lawrence.





Right next to the castle is the road that leads to the pass, where there is a refuge and an inn that is a popular destination for excursions. Before the mountain road descends in numerous hairpin bends to the Prosecco hills of Altamara, a marvellous view opens up over the hills and the Venetian plain. If visibility is good, you can see the lagoon from here. Finally, you descend to the small village of Valmareno, overlooked by the Renaissance Castelbrando Castle. The castle can be reached from the back of the rocky spur on which the municipality of Cison di Valmarino is located. Valmareno, on the other hand, belongs to Follina, which lies a little further west and whose old monastery is well worth a visit.

The Via Claudia Augusta then continues towards Treviso for the final section.

The Roman road and the Via Claudia Augusta cycle path continue from Quarto D'Altino to Altino, the site of the ancient harbour on the Adriatic Sea at the edge of the lagoon. Here there is an archaeological museum with a model of the port city that is well worth a visit. From here you can reach Venice by train or boat across the lagoon.

Today, the Via Claudia Augusta is travelled by countless visitors for shorter, and for longer distances. For true hiking enthusiasts, it is one of the possible routes that can be travelled either by bike or on foot. There are also several opportunities to stop along the way and take advantage of the services offered by the various villages. This route is an excellent opportunity to fully experience nature, and the art, that time has given us. Walking in the footsteps of the past.

