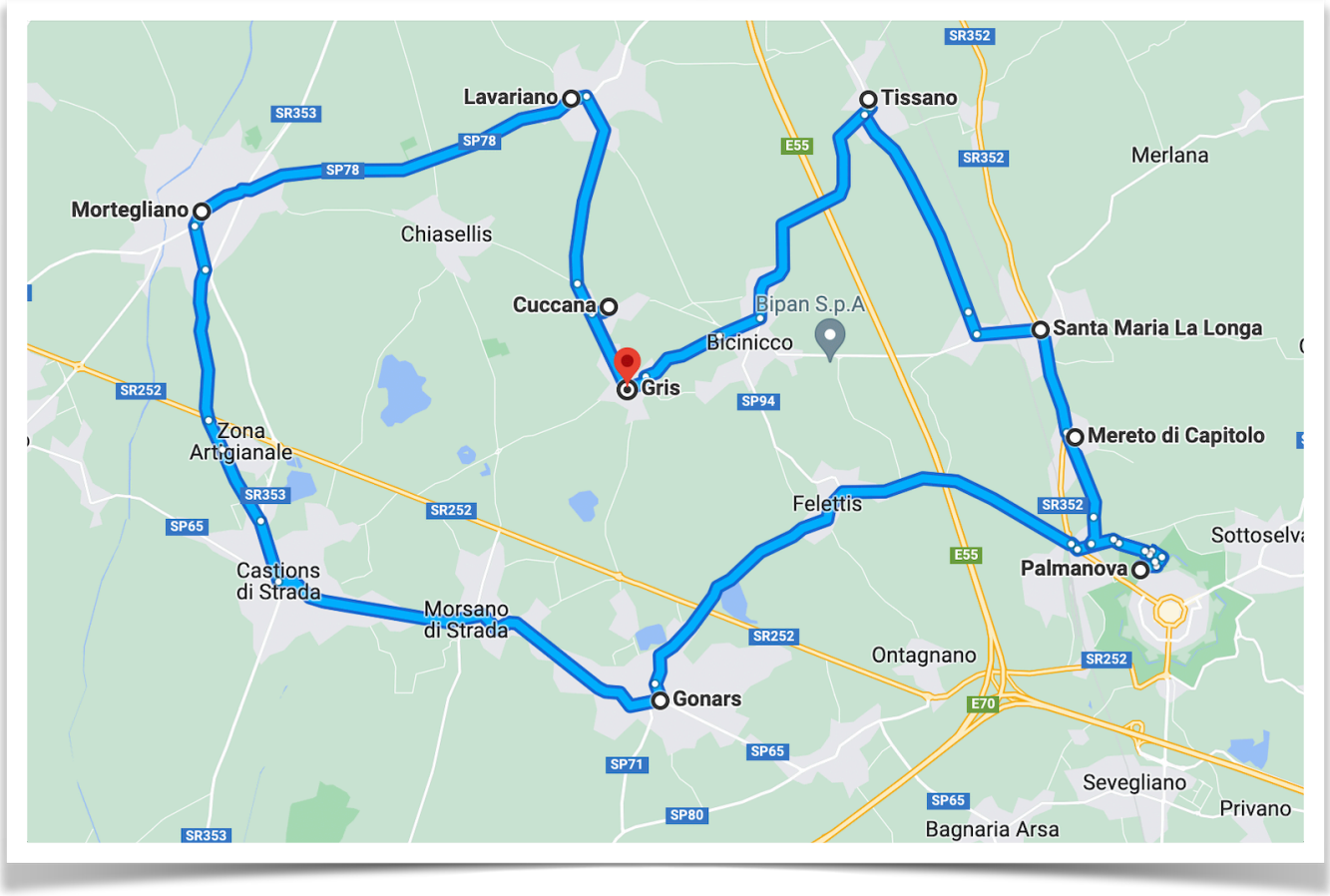
CHIESA
di SANT'ANDREA
APOSTOLO

GRIS AND SURROUNDINGS BY BIKE



The church of Gris results on the edge of the Alpe Adria cyclovia that connects Vienna with Grado. Gris is located 2.5 km to the right, going down the cyclovia, of the villages of Tissano, Santa Maria la Longa and Mereto di Capitolo. From these it is easily reached along side roads, shown on the map.

Gris is also located in the center of a polygon that has as its vertices some places of historical and artistic interest.

Immediately to the north is the small village of **Cuccana**, which preserves in the church of San Marco, coeval with that of Gris, fragments of frescoes by the same hand as the Gris painter.

Continuing beyond Cuccana is **Lavariano**, an ancient parish church to which the parish of Gris originally belonged. The 18th-century church of San Paolo contains valuable polychrome marble altars from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. A small church of Lombard origin survives in the cemetery area. Proceeding from Lavariano westward on secondary roads through vast cultivated plots, one crosses the small civil airport Aviosuperficie AS77.

Bending westward we reach **Mortegliano**, a town of ancient origin made fertile by the passage of the Cormor stream. Repeatedly destroyed by the Turks until the early 1500s, it commissioned Giovanni Martini to create an altarpiece as a vow to Virgin Mary, dedicated to the dead caused by the Turkish invasions. The sculptor created his masterpiece, the most famous polychrome altar in Friulian wooden sculpture, five meters high with more than sixty statues. Today it is preserved in the cathedral. Mortegliano's bell tower at 113 meters is the tallest in Italy and one of the tallest in Europe.

Continuing westward, one crosses the village of **Castions di Strada**. Here the small church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, dating from the 12th century, was entirely frescoed in the same years as the church in Gris. Only part of the highly refined complex of paintings, inspired by the same iconographic program as St. Andrew's, survives to this day. These frescoes are believed to be attributable to the hand of Gaspare Negro. The small church of Santa Maria delle Grazie was the object of pilgrimages from surrounding localities until recent years, as a reminder of Our Lady's intercession during the plague that raged in Friuli in the mid-1700s.

Toward the southwest, in the direction of Latisana, we encounter a small but valuable national park, the Torbiera Selvote biotope.

Proceeding from Castions southeast and in a circle from Gris, one comes to **Gonars**, where traces survive of the site where an internment camp for prisoners from Italian-occupied Slovenian and Croatian territories stood during World War II. The train arrival track and the perimeter of the camp are still visible. In the 1960s a shrine dedicated to all the victims who died here was erected in the cemetery area.

Continuing southeast, one finds the Alpe Adria bike path south of **Palmanova**. The famous starred city built in the late 16th century is well worth a visit, with its gates, still intact, the city's historical museum and the fortified ramparts surrounding it. Continuing south on the Alpe Adria you reach the famous Roman city of **Aquileia** and then on to Grado, or in the direction of Trieste.

Beyond the bike path, following a secondary road in the direction of **Visco**, one crosses after a few kilometers the village of Joannis di Aiello, at which an important necropolis

from the late medieval period (9th-10th centuries) was recently discovered. The necropolis was located below a 'canepa,' i.e., an early medieval grain storehouse that was at the center of the 'centa,' a defensive settlement surrounded by walls.

If, instead of proceeding southward, one wants to go up the Alpe Adria bike path in a northerly direction to conclude the circular route around the church of Sant'Andrea, one first encounters **Mereto di Capitolo** in which it is possible to visit the small 15th-century church of San Pietro, next to which stood an Augustinian monastery, mentioned as early as 1371, which later became a farmhouse in forms typical of 18th-century rural Friulian architecture. Some valuable frescoes dating from the same years as those in Gris survive in the church.

Just above is **Santa Maria la Longa**, a town that was a military base and airport during World War I, whose center preserves several buildings of 16th-century origin and two fine villas. In the former Villa dei Canonici di Aquileia (now Villa Vintani-Milocco), the sister of writer Ippolito Nievo lived.

The cemetery church is located at the height of a resurgent water spring, which was an object of worship in pre-Christian times. At the church were shot in 1917 the insurgents of the Catanzaro Brigade, executed by decimation during the largest mutiny ever in the Italian army, which the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio also recounted. A monument by Udine sculptor Giorgio Celiberti commemorates him in front of the town hall. During the war the Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti was also in Santa Maria. It is said that he composed some famous poems here, including "*M'illumino d'immenso"*.

From Santa Maria la Longa, continue the bike path northward to reach the nearby village of **Tissano** where there is the 16th-century Villa Agricola (later Del Torso), now a hotel, and Villa Caimo Mauroner, currently an exhibition venue for temporary exhibitions.

From Santa Maria la Longa you can also proceed eastward along a detour of the bike path until you reach the ancient rural village of **Clauiano**, which has undergone a recent urban restoration that has returned it to its presumed original 17th-century layout, reconstructing the cobblestone streets and restoring the ancient stone buildings. The charming village center also has an old building used for cultural and exhibition initiatives.