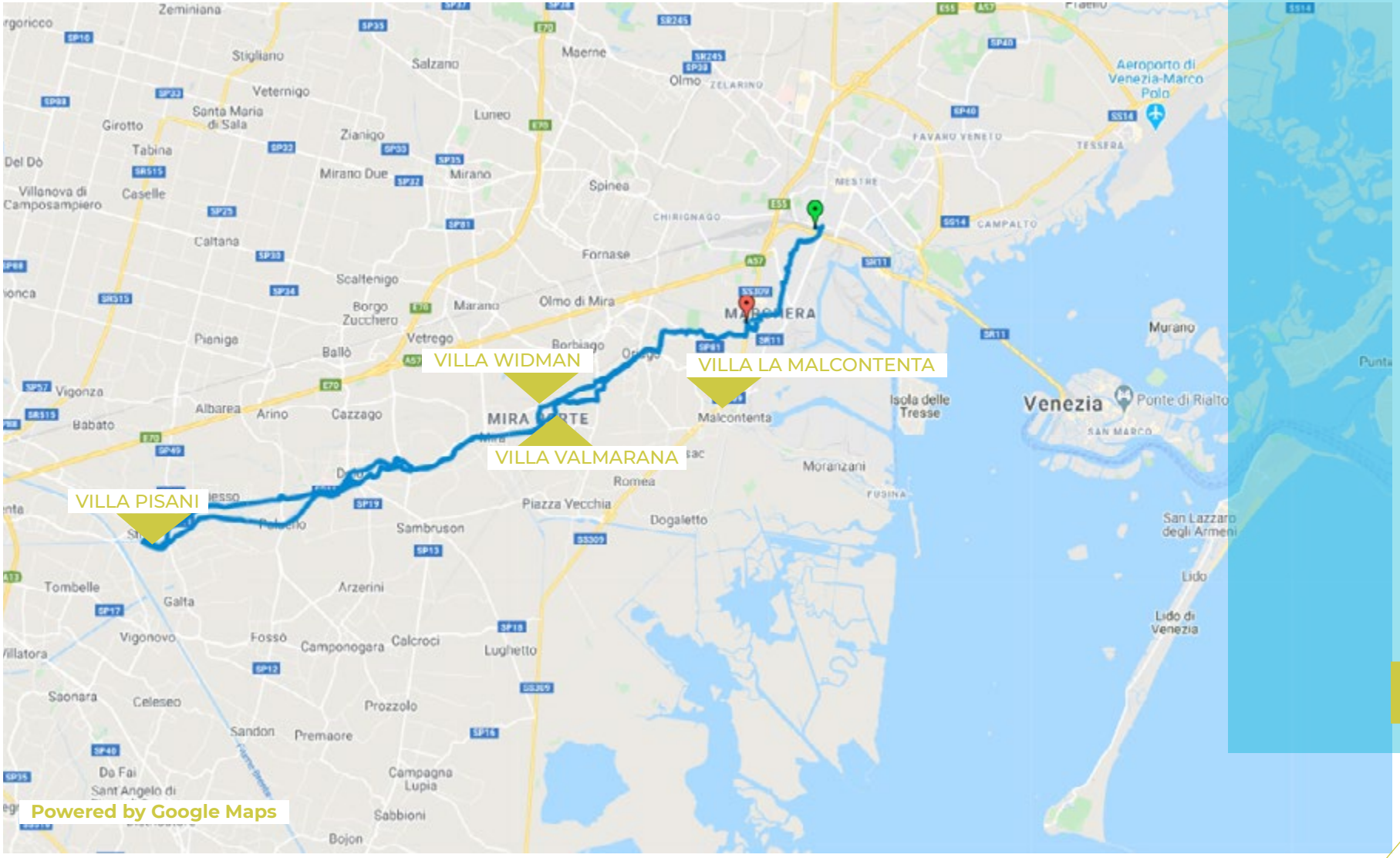


THE BRENTA RIVER AND ITS VILLAS

SECOND TRIP: The Brenta river and its Villas
DEPARTURE: Mestre train station
ARRIVAL: Mestre train station
DIFFICULTY: Easy, on secondary roads
LENGTH: 50 km approx.
ROAD FUND: Both paved and unsurfaced roads
RECOMMEDED BIKE: All


VILLA WIDMAN
VILLA LA MALCONTENTA
VILLA VALMARANA
VILLA PISANI
Powered by Google Maps
Zeminiana
Stigliano
Salzano
Maerne
Olmo
Aeroporto di Venezia-Marco Polo
Veternigo
Santa Maria di Sala
Girotto
Tabina
Lunèo
Zianigo
Mirano Due
Mirano
Spinea
Del Dò
Villanova di Camposampiero
Caselle
Caltana
Fornase
Scaltenigo
Borgo Zucchero
Olmo di Mira
Pianiga
Vetrego
Ballò
Vigonza
Albarea
Arino
Cazzago
Babato
MIRA
Malcontenta
Isola delle Tresse
Venezia
Ponte di Rialto
Murano
Moranzani
Romea
Piazza Vecchia
Sambruson
Dogaletto
San Lazzaro degli Armeni
Lido
Lido di Venezia
Tombelle
Galta
Arzerini
Vigonovo
Fossò
Camponogara
Calcroci
Lughetto
Saonara
Celeseo
Prozzolo
Sandon
Premaore
Campagna Lupia
Sabbioni
Bojon

THE MAP



ORIAGO

A wonderful, pretty long tour (little less than 50 kilometers back and forth) you can take anyway you, or your legs, feel like doing: lazily riding comfortable e-bikes, or full speed on your nippy racing bike.

Not on cycle paths but totally flat, with two variants: the right riverside is busier but wider; the left one is narrower but quieter and, with some challenging sections under heavy motor traffic.

Both are beautiful and picturesque, lined with low colorful houses suddenly giving way to imposing villas that double their charm by mirroring in the Brenta river.

The numerous and important buildings overlooking the waterway make the Riviera del Brenta famous in the world.

We suggest that you use the left bank at the start: cycle at good pace, get to Villa Pisani at Stra in a sprint, dedicate

VILLA WIDMAN FOSCARI REZZONICO



BACK TO THE MAP

The numerous and important buildings overlooking the waterway make the Riviera del Brenta famous in the world.



some time to visit this beautiful villa; and then return to Mestre the other way, stopping to visit Villa Witman Foscari Rezzonico and Villa Valmarana.

La Malcontenta is not to be missed either; alone it is worth a small detour. You might also want to get off your bike every now and then to enjoy some of the small villages you come across, such as Dolo, with its old mill and the small bar inside.

That's exactly what we did: getting straight to Stra by the left bank and visit Villa Pisani, already promising to be spectacular when seen from the outside.

The only drawback for cyclists and bicycle tourists is the absence of an organized and guarded parking area for bicycles, not even nearby.

There are no stacks or deposits. So, while a few individual cyclists can find a pole to tie their bike to, this can be a problem for large groups. In this case we recommend that you leave your bike in town and walk to the Villa.

VILLA PISANI

Historical background

Stra was incorporated in the Venetian Republic in the 16th century. It was the ideal place for the nobles of the Serenissima, the “Most Serene” as the Republic of Venice was called, to build their lavish mansions along the Brenta river. Villa Pisani is an emblematic example. It is among the most important architectural heritage in Italy, and its frescoes are by none other than Giambattista and Giandomenico Tiepolo, and Mengozzi Colonna.

At first glance you can understand why the “Queen of the Venetian Villas” is one of the main tourist attractions in this region. Imposing and solemn, in its 114 rooms it has hosted doges, kings and emperors. Today it is a national museum collecting 18th and 19th century furniture and works of art, including Gianbattista Tiepolo’s masterpiece “Glory of the Pisani Family”, the fresco on the ceiling of the Ballroom.

The surrounding park is also charming with views and architectures, today as it was in the past. So many are the scenic, architectural and historical wonders around that you should plan to stay quite a while to fully enjoy them: the Coffee House at the Esedra; the garden maze, among the most important in Europe; the precious citrus collection in the Orangery, and the plant and flower collection in the Tropical Greenhouses.

Villa Pisani also hosts great art exhibitions that every year attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to Stra.

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GARDEN VILLA PISANI

Next to Villa Pisani, you can find Villa Foscarini Rossi, and visit the Footwear Museum there.

After a long and very interesting stop-over devoted to visiting and photographing Villa Pisani and its stables, as well as strolling in the park (we advise racing cyclists to bring their “shoe covers” to avoid having to choose whether to wear out their shoes or give up the visit), we biked back to Mestre on the other bank stopping every now and then to see the other Villas and then to have lunch .

Cycling makes you hungry and lunchtime comes in a heartbeat.
We picked a restaurant with a small terrace overlooking the river, something in between a Venetian inn and an English pub.

The owner’s welcome was compelling: not only did she serve us even though

it was quite late (in this area lunch is served between 1 and 2pm, and that's it), but when asked to shelter the bikes she didn't hesitate and saw us to the back of the restaurant, where we could safely park and forget about them.

The choice of the place proved more than right: this welcoming trattoria prepares excellent local dishes and delicious pizzas. And quantity satisfies hungry cyclists.

Full of energy we were ready to head for the next Villas.
Once in Mira, we started from Villa Foscari Rezzonico Widmann (very little little bike friendly since there are no stacks there either).

Historical background
Back in the 18th century, it initially belonged to the Serimanns, Venetian nobles of Persian origin; later, in the middle of the same century, it passed on to the Widmann family, who shaped it in the present structure modernizing it according to French Rococo taste.

The central body thus became a location for parties and receptions.

The main hall was decorated around 1765 by two artists who were very much in vogue and highly regarded in Venetian circles at the time: Giuseppe Angeli (1712-



VILLA WIDMANN FOSCARI REZZONICO



1798), a disciple of Giambattista Piazzetta, and Gerolamo Mengozzi Colonna, Tiepolo's favourite collaborator.

The complex is currently owned by the Metropolitan City of Venice.

We started our visit in the park, located north of the Villa. Lime trees, cypresses and horse chestnuts form a background for the numerous stone statues, like flats in a theatre. On the right hand side and behind the barchessa (a typical service building), a large space hosts some greenhouses, and a romantic pond created in the late nineteenth-century, where plenty of marsh cypress trees plunge their roots in the water.

The nearby wrought-iron gazebo was designed to ensure privacy for who knows what secret meetings. A small hill stands out in the garden, and we were explained that a hollow inside once served as an ice-house.

We then discovered that in spite of all their luxury these villas of the glorious past had

INTERNAL VILLA WIDMANN

no bathrooms. Everything had to be lavish and even the kitchens were built away from the house to avoid mixing different social classes under the same roof.

Beside frescoes, the interiors preserve all the original furniture, including some huge Murano glass “Ca’ Rezzonico” chandeliers, which are entirely assembled with an ingenious system of hollow glasses, so that they can be disassembled to clean them. Thanks to this peculiarity it has not been difficult to equip them with electrical wires in modern times.

We then crossed the road and the river to the “sister” Villa Valmarana, which is part of the same cultural network and can be visited with a bundle ticket (good value for money). The person who welcomed us was very kind, caring and absolutely bike-friendly: we were able to park our bikes on a stack directly inside the park.

Historical background
The Barchessa is all that remains of the original 17th-century Villa Valmarana, which consisted of the main building and two side buildings, called “barchesse”.

Technically speaking, the barchessa is the part of the villa that served as a granary; boats were also stored under its arches (hence the name – from “barca”, Italian for boat) since at the time it was forbidden to moor them in the river.

At the end of the last century, the two barchesse at Villa Valmarana were still standing, while the central body had been demolished. But a different future was awaiting the two buildings: the one on the left passed into the hands of six families, who substantially modified its architectural structure to gain more space; the one on the right first became a tavern and was finally purchased by sculptor Luciano Minguzzi who restored it to its original splendour.

Upper classes led a glamorous lifestyle in the last period of the Maritime Republic of Venice, and their huge parties could last several days and required more space to accommodate guests. For this reason the barchesse of the Villa were converted into guest houses. Seen from the outside, the remaining one looks monumental due to the large double-column portico, which was meant to be a sign of prestige and even a bit of a show off.

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VILLA VALMANARA



A painting by Andrea Baccaro stands out inside the barchessa, as well as an original Ca' Rezzonico chandelier with its peculiar colours obtained by oxidation, without putting any pigments in the glass paste. The portraits and the ceiling fresco are attributed to Tiepolo. The anthropomorphic representation of the Brenta river follows you by the eye while you are moving around the room: a typical technique by Tiepolo, which still surprises visitors today. Worthy to be mentioned are also a figure of Christ with Chinese features and the oldest chandelier, dating back to 1500, made of brass, wood and gold foil.

Back on our way home, a very small detour allowed us to meet another of the wonderful architectural masterpieces in the area.

LA MALCONTENTA

Historical background

Known as La Malcontenta, Villa Foscari is a Venetian villa designed by architect Andrea Palladio from Vicenza and built in 1559 at Malcontenta, a town a few kilometres from Mira.

Villa Foscari is majestic, seated on its base, and seems to look down on the other villas from its solemn spot. It is a typically Palladian building, whose unmistakable style is common to many of

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INTERNAL VILLA VALMANARA

TOWER COLOMBAIA





the architect's works, where monumentality is achieved through humble materials such as plaster and bricks.

Many legends and anecdotes are told about La Malcontenta and the origins of its name, which some trace back to a noblewoman of the Foscari family who would have been locked up here for life because of her unchaste conduct.

Together with other Palladian masterpieces in the region, this villa was included in 1996 in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

From here we turned towards Mestre and calmly cycled back to the station along the Naviglio del Brenta (the ancient natural riverbed of the Brenta), enjoying the sunset, and fighting the inevitable mosquitoes.

In our eyes remained the spectacular images of the villas and historical monuments overlooking the Brenta river and reflected in the water.



THE BURCHIELLO

THE BURCHIELLO

A MINI CRUISE IN THE LAND OF THE DOGES

By Germana Cabrelle

In 1760, the famous playwright Giacomo Casanova wrote a plaquette in Venetian octaves, Il Burchiello di Padova, and talked about the small houseboat that went from the Fusina dock through the Brenta river to the Portello (literally “small port”) in Padua, passing through the locks of Mira, Dolo and Stra.

At the time, “the delightful and comfortable car” was pulled by horses that trotted along the banks.

Now, a modern motorboat slides on the waters of the Riviera del Brenta leaving from Padua or Venice every other day, from March to October.

The excursion has a high historical, cultural, artistic and environmental value: from the river you can admire over fifty sumptuous villas that used to be the summer residences of noble Venetian families.

The boat stops at the most beautiful and important: Villa Foscari called “La Malcontenta”, Barchessa Valmarana, Villa Widmann and the superb Villa Pisani.

The entire journey is particularly evocative.

The hydraulic works that allow navigation are of high technological value: three locks and nine movable bridges. 33 kilometers and over 8 meters of drop characterize the route.

Travel time is around eight and a half hours on (seasonal) average, with boarding at 9 AM and arrival at 6.40 AM.

Plenty of time during navigation, therefore, to admire all these marvels in sequence, combining art, music, theatre, gastronomy and oenology.

From Venice, city of dreams and love, to the rural views of the lagoon and to the magnificent villas in the mainland.

The Burchiello is a sort of floating salon where you can almost take a...dive in time, plunging yourself in a unique dimension of romance.



VILLA VALMANARA

ROARING STARS

CAMPOLONGO MAGGIORE THANKS TO TIGER EXPERIENCE

Byi Germana Cabrelle

If you're not Italian you probably won't remember the black panther in a 2015 tv spot by Breil watches. But many Italians would remember the magnetic eyes of the black panther in the opening sequence of Adriano Celentano's Rocky Economy show.

Regardless of memories, that panther (a black leopard, to be true) is alive and well. His name is Viper, he is 15 years old and lives in a big cats park in Campolongo Maggiore, managed by an association devoted to the care of big cats.

Tiger Experience – this is the name of the site - is located within the territory of greater Venice , the so called – in Italian - Città Metropolitana, just a few kilometers from the bike path along the Brenta River.

To visit the park and its big cats you must first call and make a reservation because, as you can imagine, you cannot move around alone.

During your guided tour you will plunge into an exciting and extraordinary environment with big cats of different species: lions, tigers, leopards but also birds of prey, parrots, raccoons and other animals that you might only have seen in books!

An afternoon at the park is a must-do experience that will give you unforgettable emotions.



We are not talking about a zoo, but a dedicated park, where animals are loved, cared for and live like a family, in a wide green area –obviously fenced in for safety reasons. All the animals are cared after by qualified staff, led by a passionate feline trainer who has always lived in contact with them, treating them with special kindness. For their beauty, these big cats are often asked to appear on television and film sets.

In Campolongo Maggiore you will be really close to these animals and witness their privileged relationship with mankind. You will see the trainer feeding a puppy with a bottle, playing with these 200 kilos cats to the point of having a tiger jump on his shoulder, and congratulating with a simple "Good boy!" whispered in the ear.

Everybody in the park works with maximum respect and dedication to all animals, a philosophy that is summed up on the entry sign and on the website with the phrase: "We do not own any animal. Every animal belongs to itself. We are only the "keepers", that is, people who have the duty and the opportunity to take care of them".

The main objective of the Association is to inform visitors about the life of animals in captivity, by showing the special relationship that has developed in the years between animals and keepers.

Activities began in the early 2000s thanks to the founder's passion for animals, his training in the best American schools and the experience gained in different zoos around the world.

The Association was then founded and several lions, tigers and other big cats started to be welcomed at Campolongo Maggiore park, some of them coming from difficult situations. Here they have found care and serenity, giving birth to offspring you can get to

see today.
This park is located in the countryside, halfway between Venice and Padua. There are basically three types of guided tours:

1) Tiger Tour: guided tour of about 2 hours to discover ethology and habits of animals, perfect to learn about big cats while admiring specimens you have never seen before.

2) Tiger Exclusive: in-depth visit lasting about 4 hours, for a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 4 people to discover the secrets of training and the incredible relationship that trainers manage to create with these creatures; relationship based on trust and mutual respect. An entertaining and educational experience to clear doubts and satisfy curiosity, not only about big cats, but also about birds of prey and other species that live in the park. An opportunity to overcome prejudices about wild animals and think about how they perceive their environment.

3) Ranger for a day (only for real enthusiasts): a whole day alongside keepers to understand the everyday duties and dedication needed to take care of these animals.

Every now and then the Association also organizes conferences and meetings with veterinarians, ethologists and animal trainers, and, in its library, the showing of documentaries.



RECIPE

A DELICIOUS SUPER CAKE
TORTONA DI DOLO, A TYPICAL DESSERT OF THE RIVIERA DEL BRENTA

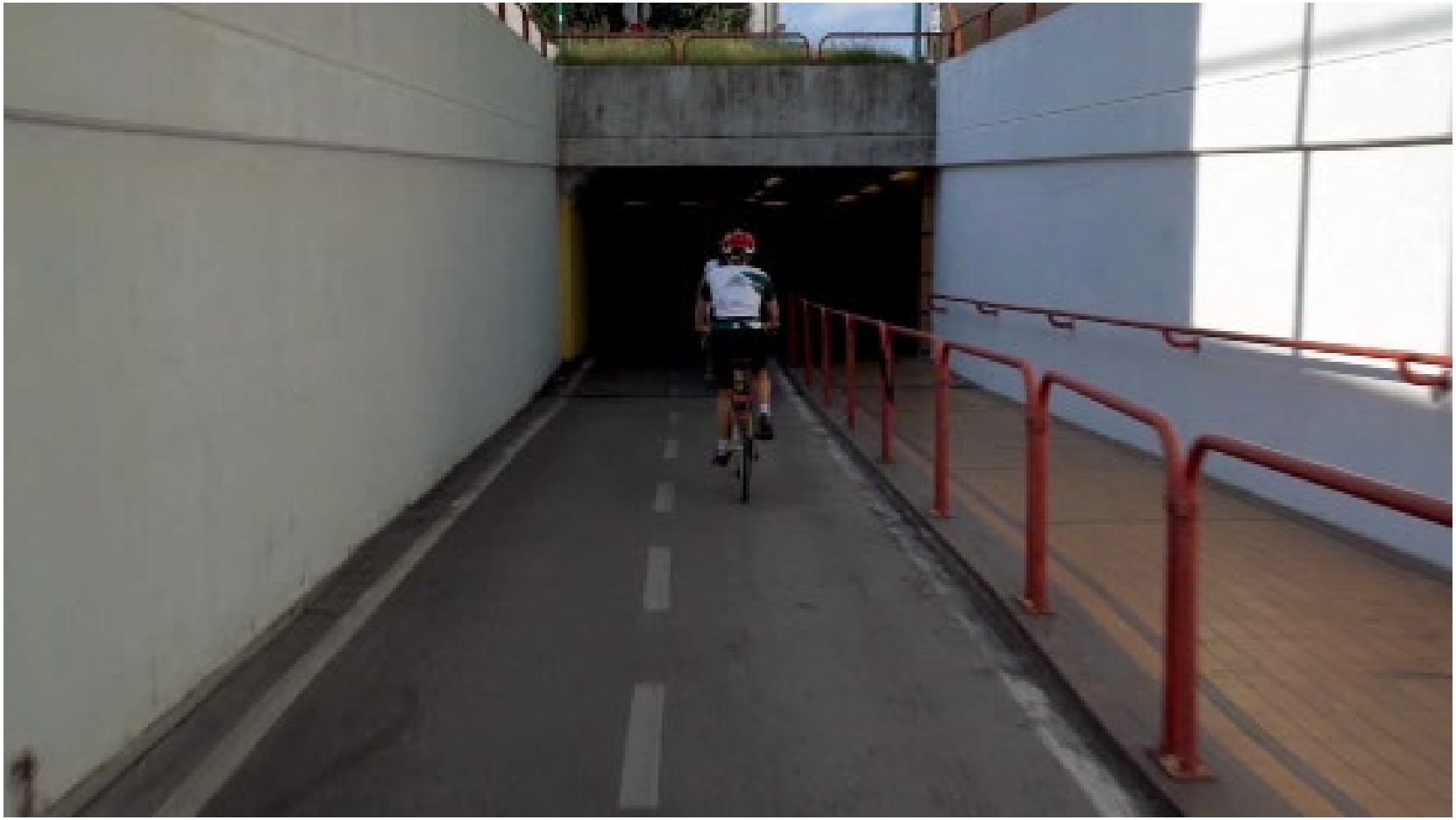
As a souvenir of your cycling along the Brenta river, on the route that retraces the journey of the ancient Burchiello barge, you can stop in Dolo and buy a special and very typical super cake.

Tortona, literally 'big cake', is a trademark and recipe registered by the local Chamber of Commerce, and refers to a cake made and marketed by artisan pastry chefs and bakers of Dolo according to their creativity.

The secrets about the ingredients and the correct preparation of the registered cake are summarized in the guidelines that the Pro Loco (Tourist Bureau) of Dolo has drawn for the use of this trademark. Ingredients are simple (wheat flour, corn flour, milk, salt, cocoa, butter), but what makes this cake rich and delicious, perfect for the autumn season, are the dried fruits it contains – apples, figs, raisins, pine nuts – as well as honey, orange juice, lemon and orange peel, fennel seeds, and a taste of vanilla and cinnamon.



VIDEO EXPERIENCE



DOWNWLOAD
GPX TRACK

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