



FUMANE

A natural bridge between the Valpolicella and Lessinia



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## Fumane

### A NATURAL BRIDGE BETWEEN THE VALPOLICELLA AND LESSINIA

The municipality of Fumane is spread out between the plain, the hills of the Valpolicella and the Lessini Mountains. The morphology of the area varies widely, with an altitude ranging from 155 metres asl at San Francesco, to the 1128 metres asl of Monte Pastello.

Let's look at how we might explore it starting from the lowest altitude, in the south of the area, from the broad valley bottom of the village of Fumane, in a landscape marked by vineyards. Moving towards east, tucked away far from the main roads, is the hamlet of Casterna, flanked by two waterways: Prognò di Fumane to the east and the Lena Torrent to the west. Although both classified as torrents, they are indicative of the abundance of water to be found in the area. Just before moving up away from the plain, you'll come to the village of Fumane.

The name, of mediaeval origin, derives from the expression Le Fumane, referring to the fog banks or areas of low cloud that still form today on damp autumn days in the Lena Valley, behind the Fumana hill. What we today call Fumane is none other than a group of ancient neighbourhoods, which construction work over the last few decades has bound together to form a single village. So to the west of the Prognò lie the neighbourhoods of Volta, le Banchette with Villa Della Torre, and Cà Melchiorri with the parish church, while located to the east are Isola, la Casetta, Osan, le Bertarole and il Vaio.

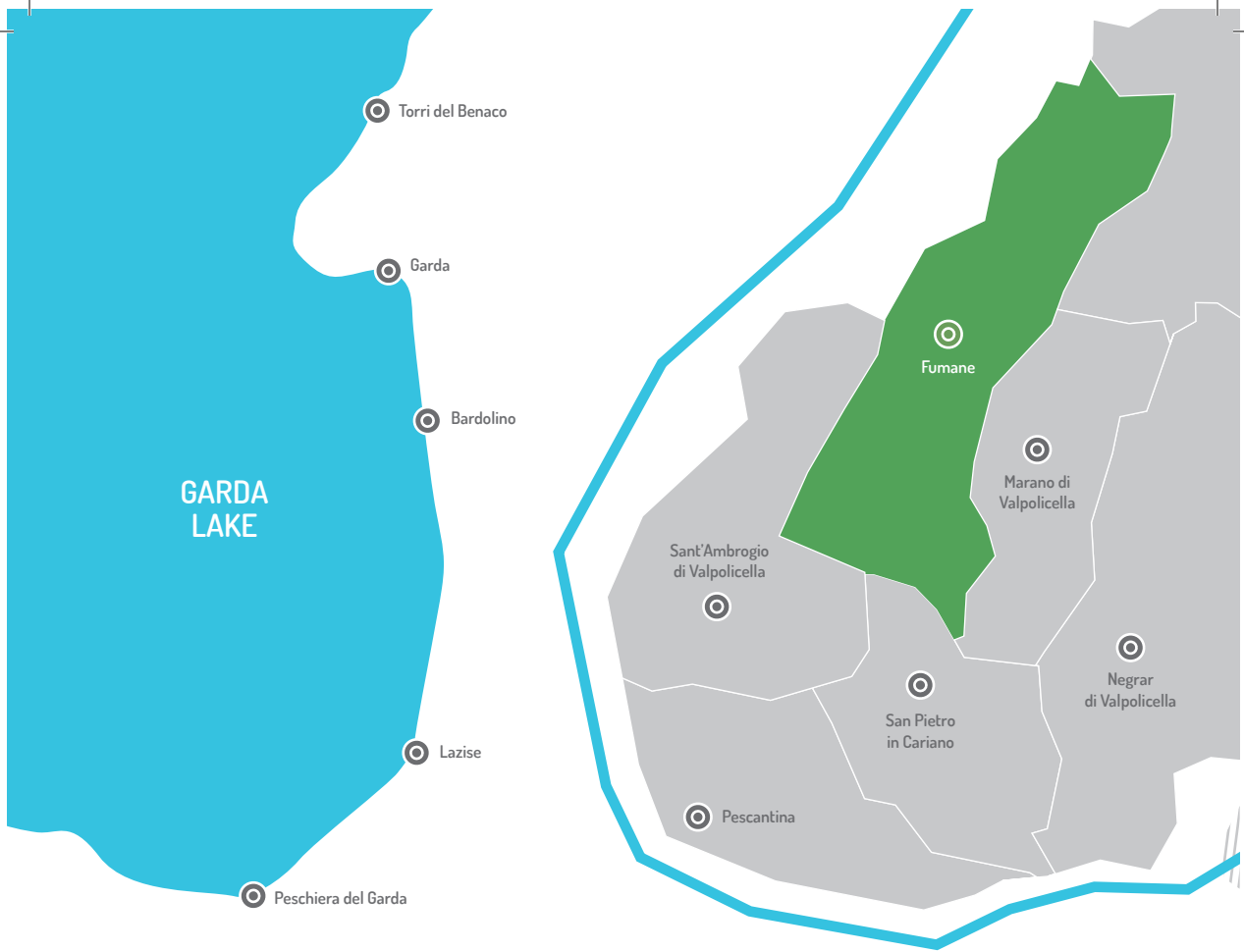
The first hills we come to appear to encircle the plain in a protective embrace. Still visible here on the terracing, along with the vines, are traces of olive trees and the odd cherry tree. To the east is Monte

View over Fumane



Sant'Urbano; to the north Monte Santoccio and the Incisa hill, with The Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette; to the west, the small Fumana rises and the San Micheletto hill, which were once home to a mediaeval castle. A climb up alongside the Progno di Fumane torrent leads to the mountain area, which occupies most of the municipality, and some stretches of which are comprised within the Lessinia Regional Natural Park. All of a sudden, the landscape changes: the open plain moves into a canyon-like cleft in the rocks, resulting from the process of erosion caused by water and the elements: this is the "Valle dei Progni". This type of terrain alternates with a gentler landscape, marked by human activity and featuring crops, neighbourhoods and villages, amid hornbeam, downy oak, fraxinella and beech wood, as well as areas of reforestation featuring Austrian pine, Norway spruce and Scots pine. The valley is home to the Grotta di Fumane cave, an archaeological site of international importance. Further up is the neighbourhood of Molina, with its mills and the Waterfall Park, which each year attracts thousands of visitors. Further north lies the village of Gorgusello, with the nearby quarries of Pietra della Lessinia, the stone used for all the elements that make up the traditional local architecture: slabs of this material were used for masonry work, fountains, decorative and structural elements, roads and fences. The main villages are joined by a number of smaller neighbourhoods, such as Manune, Togni, Pizzolana, Prari, Sottosengia, Cà Moccolo, Sengia Rossa and Botesela. The main architectural feature here is the courtyard, with other frequent elements including dovecots, fountains, washtubs and community dairy huts. To the far north is the interesting hamlet of Breonio, the main village in the upper Fumane Valley since the Middle Ages, and the administrative centre of the municipality until 1929. Rising up on the western edge is Monte Pastello, with its rich biodiversity, home to ancient Rosso Ammonitico quarries and a spectacular balcony offering views across the Valdadige, Monte Baldo and Lake Garda. Perched on the ridge are the long-established hamlets of Cavalo and Mazzurega, as well as smaller neighbourhoods such as Verago, Molane, Navesa, Paretto and Camporiondo.





## Valpolicella

### THE AREA

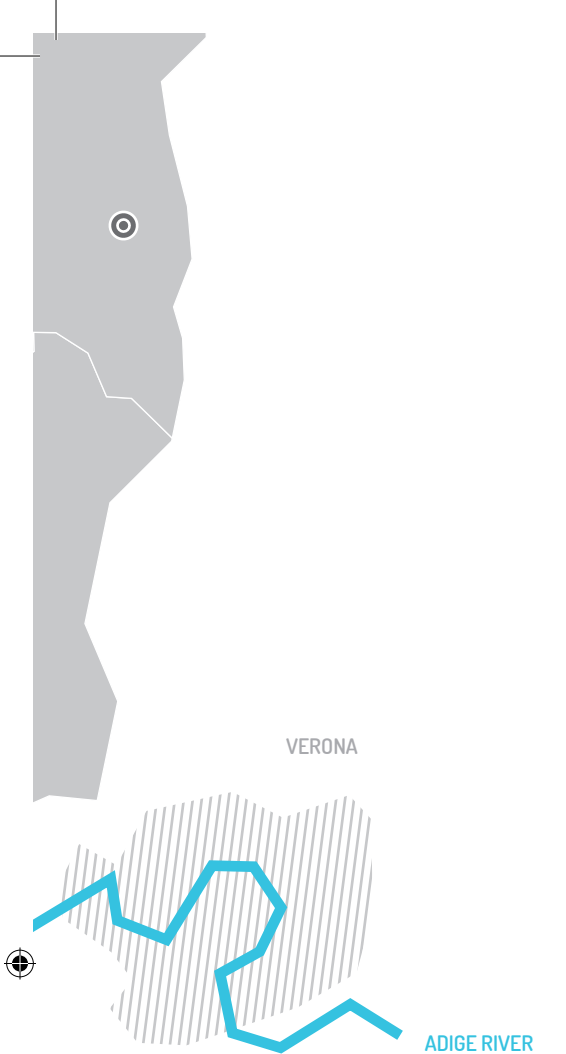
Nestling amid Verona, the Lessini Mountains, the Valdadige and Lake Garda, the Valpolicella has been chosen as an ideal place to live since Prehistoric times.

Located in a strategic position just where the Adige River exits the narrow, mountainous Trento valley and flows into the Po Plain, this “buffer” area has been an obligatory through area for Man since ancient times.

The origins of the name Valpolicella stretch back to the end of the 12th century. Following the Peace of Constance in 1183, when the Municipal Council of Verona set about reorganising the area, hitherto divided into two zones, the Vallis Provinianensis and the Vallis Veriacus, favour was found with a name linked to a particular physical feature of the area: the emergence of what were known as poleselle: sandy islands rich in vegetation that formed in the meanders of the Adige, which would have been clearly visible to travellers coming up the river, the main communication route of the time.

In terms of morphology, the area is divided into three distinct zones: the plain in the south, surrounded by the Adige, the rolling hills in the centre and the mountains in the north, the gateway to the Alps. It is crossed by three main valleys, following three torrents, known here as progni: from west to east, the valleys of Fumane, Marano and Negrar.

The most striking feature of the rolling hillside landscape are the terraces, supported by dry stone walls, known here as marogne, which support and soften the land, allowing the typical crops of the Valpolicella to be



Marogne (dry stone walls)



grown. Built in local stone, the building methods used and the way the ashlar are arranged, with a technique honed over the centuries, these walls are often authentic works of art and rural architecture, and it is no coincidence that in 2021, the terraced hills of the Valpolicella were placed on the national register of historical rural landscapes.

The climate, the abundance of water and the fertile land have been conducive to viticulture in the Valpolicella since ancient times. Virgil and Martial wrote of a "Rhaetian wine" as far back as the Roman age, and Cassiodorus mentioned the presence of an "acinaticum" on Barbarian tables. These were the "ancestors" of today's Recioto, while the better-known Amarone became successful only a few decades ago. The current economy of the Valpolicella is also founded on other fruits traditionally grown here, such as olives, cherries and peaches.

Since ancient times, the area has also been renowned for the quarrying and working of local stone and marble, in particular Rosso Ammonitico and Pietra della Lessinia.

Here the ancient Romans found an indigenous population of Rhaetian-Etruscan origin, the Arusnates, whom they granted a relatively significant degree of autonomy, especially in terms of religion, organising them into a Pagus. Between 1311 and 1325, the Valpolicella became a county, given as a fief to Federico della Scala and retaining a measure of independence from the Municipality of Verona.

During Venetian domination (1405-1797), it was the seat of a deanery, to which Venice granted a number of privileges, and it was chosen as a holiday destination by many noble families from Verona and beyond, who built fabulous villas here, often with elegant parks and gardens, many of which can be visited to this day.

The modern-day visitor cannot fail to notice some splendid examples of sacred art: from the centuries-old parishes and their churches to the smaller churches and oratories dotted all over the area. This enchanting landscape has also inspired numerous literary greats over the centuries, including Dante Alighieri, who was exiled to Verona, and whose descendants chose to settle here.



HISTORY: ARCHAEOLOGY AND VILLAS

I





## Grotta di Fumane, a link in the evolution of humankind

The Grotta di Fumane cave is one of the most important prehistoric archaeological sites in Europe. The excavations and the studies conducted since it was discovered in 1964 have now made it possible to estimate that the site was frequented by humans for a period of time between 90,000 and 33,000 years from the present: during those almost 60,000 years Neanderthal Man evolved into Homo Sapiens. In Fumane, Neanderthal Man proved skilful in working flint, a rock found in abundance in Lessinia and the Valpolicella, from which he was able to make tools such as scrapers and arrow tips, used to hunt and butcher prey or to remove and work their hide.

He also demonstrated a certain sense of beauty, using the feathers of birds of prey and shells as embellishments. He was also in complete control of fire, which allowed him to keep warm, cook food and light his shelters. Some 44,000 years ago saw the arrival in Fumane of Homo Sapiens, who prevailed over Neanderthal Man, perhaps because he was better able to exploit the resources offered by the land.

Exceptional finds indicating his presence here include a milk tooth dating to 40,800 years ago, one of the oldest in Italy; some 900 seashells, many of them pierced and used as decorative elements, and fragments of rock painted with red ochre, featuring subjects such as a human figure that may have been a shaman, demonstrating a primitive spirituality among Homo Sapiens.

Since 1988, the research here has been coordinated by the University of Ferrara. The current roof was built in 2005, allowing for a safe visit to the caves and the most important sections, and 2015 saw the completion of the visitor centre in Via dei Progni, the ideal place for visitors to the area and for workshop activities.

The Grotta di Fumane cave



The Shaman, archaeological finding



## The Venetian villas

In Fumane, one of the most beautiful Venetian villas - elegant, distinguished constructions surrounded by gardens and outbuildings - is Villa della Torre, a particularly interesting example of sixteenth-century Renaissance architecture. It remains unclear who the building can be attributed to, although the inspiration for the project can certainly be considered to have come from Giulio Romano, one of the leading lights of Mannerism, who designed Palazzo Te in Mantua. The villa, commissioned by the noble Della Torre family and modelled on the Roman domus, was built between the 1530s and 1550s, on the site of a previous manor house belonging to the Maffei family. The construction is famous for its magnificent peristyle courtyard that welcomed prestigious

guests and illustrious humanist scholars. Of interest inside are some parts of frescoes dating to the 14th/15th century, and the Mascheroni, four splendid gargoyle-like fireplaces. Outside the manor house, set within the gardens sloping downwards, is the fishpond, while lower down is the nymphaeum, the entrance to which looks like a monster with its jaws wide open; decorated using natural elements, it has the appearance of a remote, mysterious place. In the upper of the complex is the small octagonal-shaped chapel, with the nearby tower, consecrated to Santa Maria della Corte and designed by Michele Sanmichele. Lastly, the bucintoro is a grotto that looks down onto the entire villa from above, and would have been used as a tank to collect water to supply the whole complex. Sculpted inside this fine construction is a head representing Jupiter Ammon, believed to be the work of the renowned cartographer Cristoforo Sorte.

Mascherone in Villa Della Torre



Located in the Volta neighbourhood, the Renaissance architecture of Villa Selle suggests it dates to the second half of the 16th century. This elegant building is an example of the residences featuring a portico and a loggia that typified Veronese architecture between the 15th and 16th centuries. The loggia has twelve arches, and the portico six, in keeping with the symmetry denoted by this architectural style. The slender, elegant columns and the sequence of the arches create an intentional interplay of light and shade. The façade is flanked by two solid constructions, which originally rose above the central part, giving the construction a tripartite structure. During the 19th century, the villa underwent some alterations and restoration work, which included the construction of two triple-arch structures that close off the garden on the side opposite the residence; the driveway flanked by cypress trees that starts out from the main entrance and brings perspective to the villa; the attic above the loggia with its pattern

of small, square windows, and the rectangular finial topped by pinnacles. In 1968, the villa was purchased by the Jenna family and restored.

Corte Lorenzi, in Mazzurega, probably dates to the 15th century. It is one of the oldest examples in the hills of the Valpolicella of a manor house with a portico and loggia. The main structure has a four-span portico and loggia, and features a skilful use of the local splintered stone slabs (lastame). Originally the property of the Badile family, ownership of the villa passed to the Lorenzi family in the 18th century: illustrious members of the family included Francesco (1723-1787), a well-known painter, and his brother, the abbot Bartolomeo (1732-1822), a poet and agronomist.

Villa Selle



## The churches

All the larger villages have their own church, often dating to the Middle Ages and restored on several occasions. This is the case of the church of San Zeno in Fumane, extended in the mid-18th century and embellished with a cycle of canvases of the Apostles and a fine work by Antonio Balestra. Also in Fumane, in Vaio, is the little church of Santa Maria del Degnano, first mentioned in a document from 1163. Its present form is the result of alterations carried out on the orders of the monastery of San Zeno, at the end of the 15th century. The interior of the single-nave structure, with a gabled façade and an elegant bell tower with two-light windows, was frescoed throughout in 1610 by the painter Paolo Ligozzi, with a cycle dedicated to episodes in the life of the Virgin Mary, with the Sibyls and a number of Saints.



Interior of Santa Maria del Degnano

The Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette, perched on a rock spur on the Incisa hill, with views that stretch right across the Fumane Valley, was built in 1860 at the request of the local community, under the threat of an outbreak of downy mildew, which destroyed much of the vineyards, the main resource of the area. The name of the shrine refers to the apparition of the Virgin Mary at La Salette, in France, in 1846. The domed building has an octagonal ground plan, and the reference to Mary and the young shepherds she appeared before is evident in a number of statues, both in a niche inside the shrine, and outside it, in the “Grotta del Pianto” and the nearby woods west of the shrine.

Parish Church of Fumane



Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette



Old Church of Cavalo



The old church of Cavalo features a distinctive Romanesque bell tower, dated no earlier than the end of the 13th century, and a Roman inscription inside with a dedication to the Latin goddess Lua. The present-day parish church of Cavalo, San Zeno Vescovo, was built in 1785, based on a Neoclassical design, to respond to the needs of a growing population. Inside are a number of eighteenth-century frescoes by Marco Marcola, and a fine altarpiece from 1791 by Pio Patti depicting the Virgin and Child in glory and the Saints Zeno, Eurosia and Luigi Gonzaga.



San Marziale, in Breonio, is a little gem of sacred art. The first mentions of the church date to the early 13th century, but the single-nave structure with a Latin cross plan and gabled façade that remains today derives from renovation work carried out between the 15th and 16th centuries. Inside are some particularly prestigious artworks, attributed to important artists from Verona. The chancel houses a splendid wooden polyptych from the first half of the 16th century, by the workshop of Francesco Badile. On the walls and on the vault of the apse are large sections of frescoes, with two overlapping layers recognisable: featured on the older of the two are votive images of saints painted between 1510 and 1513, probably from the workshop of Francesco Morone; in

Church of San Marziale

the more recent layer, partially covering the one below, are frescoes attributed to Domenico Brusatorzi, painted around 1550 and including images of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection of Christ and a Descent into Limbo. A new, larger parish church was built in the area south of the village between the 18th and 19th centuries. However, the instability of the land soon made the building dangerous, and it was closed down and demolished in the 1950s. All that remains of the church today are the bell tower – still in function – and the apse. The present-day parish church of Breonio, Maria Regina, was completed in 1959. Inside are some fine eighteenth-century canvases by artists such as Simone Brentana, Angelo Trevisani and Ludovico Dorigny.



EXPERIENCES AND NATURE

# II





Village of Molina

### Molina and stone architecture

Molina is a distinctive example of the stone architecture of the upper Valpolicella. Over the centuries, the presence of a significant number of mills allowed the village to grow considerably, forming a complex layout, the signature feature of which were the numerous courtyards. Each courtyard in Molina has a name, derived either from the ancestor of the family or the type of work carried out there. The name of the village itself derives from the numerous mills that were once in operation there, built to exploit the constant presence of water from the many springs in the area.

Today, based on the Austrian Land Register of 1840, around 18 mills remain, including those in ruins, those converted into homes and those that remain as they were built. Only two are still in operation, for educational or tourism purposes: Molin de Lorenzo and Molin dei Veraghi. These buildings were built from Pietra della Lessinia, in the typical local style, and could be identified by the large paddle on the outside and the two levels on the inside that contained the mechanisms of the mill. In operation until after the Second World War, they were used to grind cereals, crush walnuts and produce pressed wool, for ironworking or as sawmills to obtain wood for construction.

Waterfall Park in Molina



### Molina and the Waterfall Park

Moving down from the centre of the village towards the narrow valley, you will find the Waterfall Park, the ideal place for a day out amid the greenery. The Park is spread over an area of around 80,000 square metres, featuring a number of waterways and a rich variety of plants and wildlife. As they dash down towards the valley, the torrents that for centuries have powered the mills in the village have created striking, spectacular waterfalls in the rock, easily visible along the walking routes that run through the Park. The network of trails offers the choice of several round-trip routes, suitable for both families and more adventurous visitors. The Park is also a protected area with a rich biodiversity, and is part

of the ecological network Natura 2000, which groups the main protected areas in Italy. The purpose of the network is to guarantee the long-term maintenance, or if necessary the restoration, of the natural habitats and to protect the rare or endangered species present in the Park: both wildlife (amphibians, birds of prey, bats and freshwater crayfish) and plants (the rich rock vegetation and broadleaf forests).

### Trips around Fumane

A leisurely approach to exploring the area and discovering its multi-faceted appeal, on foot, by bike or on horseback, is an experience able to amaze both body and mind. Taking the same route at different times of the year can awaken different sensations.

Fumane is comprised within the regional project La via delle Prealpi, which links Lake Garda to the Cansiglio Forest, within a network of marked routes. The itinerary connects the hamlets in the hills and the foothills with a route that runs mainly along dirt roads, taking in a number of characteristic aspects of the Valpolicella and allowing the visitor to discover the various facets of the area's identity, offering the chance both to enjoy the views and stop off along the way to enjoy the food and wine it is renowned for.

The round-trip route that runs between Mazzurega and Breonio offers the opportunity to admire the breathtaking views over Monte Baldo, the Valdadige and the terracing planted with vines and olive trees, as well as the architecture of the rural courtyards that embellish the Valpolicella area.

### Trips in Molina



Horseback tourism in Cavalo

### Hillside paths







The natural landscape of Fumane

### Nature trails in Breonio

In the far north of the municipality is the small mountain hamlet of Breonio, located at an altitude of 900 metres above sea level: nestling in the greenery, it is surrounded by pinkish limestone senge (rock faces), as well as huge expanses of meadows, pastures, woods and little valleys that bring character to the village, creating little spots of nature where you can still breathe in the fresh air of the green-covered mountains.

Setting out from Breonio are six easy-to-medium natural trails to be explored on foot, or in some cases by mountain bike, offering the chance to delve right into the rustic, mountain atmosphere of Breonio.

Another option is a stroll through the village, admiring the courtyards and stone houses, churches and fountains with washtubs.



Valpolicella Park

### Valpolicella Park

Valpolicella is a natural protected area of around 50 hectares located between the municipalities of Fumane and Marano di Valpolicella, which in the recent past was mined by the company Cementi Rossi. After this activity came to an end, the area underwent environmental recomposition, and its

management was entrusted to the two municipal councils. The Park boasts an enormous variety of species and habitats of particular interest to naturalists, preserved to safeguard its integrity and biodiversity, and features a network of trails that can be explored throughout the year. At the centre of these routes, which run through fields, woodlands and areas planted with crops, visitors will be surprised to come upon two small lakes.



Nature trails in Fumane

### A visit to the apiary

One of the most original experiences Fumane offers is the little community apiary set up and run by the Pro Loco tourist association in Molina. Located near the neighbourhood of Molina, it offers visitors the chance to find out more about the extraordinary life of bees.

A few years ago, Fumane joined the campaign entitled “CooBEEration – apiculture for the common good”, earning the title of Bee-Friendly Municipality, with the aim of promoting a series of good practices designed to raise awareness and to protect bees, as a symbol of a more sustainable environment.

Apiary





FINE FOOD AND WINE  
IN THE VALPOLICELLA

III





A glass of Valpolicella

Typical produce



## Fine food and wine

Fumane is renowned above all today for its finest speciality: wine. Valpolicella is a Denomination that in recent years has successfully undergone a series of structural and market changes, boosting its prestigious international reputation. Much of the Denomination's success is inherent in the history of its production, strongly bound to the area's native vine varieties, including Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella and other minor native varieties, which bring an unmistakable, inimitable character to all the types of wine governed by the production regulations: Valpolicella Classico, Valpolicella Classico Superiore, Valpolicella Ripasso, as well as the D.O.C.G. labels Amarone della Valpolicella and Recioto della Valpolicella, for which the raising technique is used.

Barrels in a wine cellar



Guided tasting sessions



Fumane also produces a superb olive oil, which has earned one of the Veneto region's DOP – Protected Designation of Origin – labels: "Olio Extra Vergine di Oliva Veneto Valpolicella – Veneto Euganei e Berici e Veneto del Grappa DOP."

The top-quality olive cultivars that must be used to comply with the DOP production regulations are: Grignano and Favarò, accounting for at least 50%, as well as Leccino, Frantoio and Moraiolo.

The main distinguishing feature of the product is the traditional pressing of the olives harvested by hand straight from the tree. The outstanding organoleptic qualities of the Valpolicella's Extra-Virgin olive Oil (EVO) are shaped by the particular local climate, which benefits from the mild air of the nearby Lake Garda, and the composition of the soil: two factors that limit the use of pesticides to a minimum. This EVO is popular as a condiment, but its excellent resistance to high temperatures also ensures it is easy to digest when used in cooking of all kinds.

The cuisine of the Valpolicella has been shaped by the ready availability of a wide range of produce from the fields and meadows. This traditionally humble cooking, featuring locally grown ingredients, has also been inspired and expanded by the area's proximity to the city and the presence of prominent guests.

The menus of many traditional local restaurants thus feature farmyard animals, herbs and meat from the wild animals found in the various areas of the valley (hare, pheasant, roe deer, red deer, or fallow deer).

Meat was traditionally enjoyed here on feast days. Many families used to raise pigs for salamis and condiments, while cattle and sheep were either for



Traditional cooking

Traditional restaurant





Cherries

milk production or sale. There was an abundance of vegetables of all kinds, all year round, while fruit was only an occasional treat.

Today it is fair to speak of a cuisine that represents a culture, featuring recipes made from seasonal local produce.

A number of local restaurateurs, as is evident from their exquisitely prepared dishes, have taken it upon themselves to tap into this traditional expertise and turn it into a resource for the area, enriching their creations with the care today's cuisine requires, for dishes that are light, tasty, appealing to the eye and pay close attention to sustainability.

### Fairs and events in Fumane

During the year, visitors and locals can enjoy a number of colourful events organised thanks to the tireless efforts of the local associations, many of which offer the opportunity to sample typical produce from the area. Below is a list of the most important ones (N.B. dates may vary from year to year; check before visiting).

#### Festa del Ciclamino





Antica Fiera del Rosario



Balloon over Fumane

**Incanto e falò a Molina** – Epiphany

A charity auction featuring local products and a traditional Epiphany bonfire.

**Antica Fiera di Marzo** – the first week in March, in Fumane

A long-established fair featuring cultural events and the chance to taste local speciality foods.

**Fumane in Festa** – the third Sunday in June

Parish festival, with the chance to taste some speciality foods and evening dances with live music.

**Festa del Reguso** – the first Sunday in August, in Gorgusello

Chance to taste the typical gnocchi sbatui di malga.

**Festa del Ciclamino** – 13-15 August, in Breonio

Chance to taste some speciality foods, entertainment and funfair rides, live music and street market.

**Festa del Ritorno** – the third Sunday in August, in Manune

Chance to taste some speciality foods and evening dances with live music.

**Fiera del Miele Nuovo** – the first Sunday in September, in Molina

Market selling the newly made honey, as well as local food and craft products.

**Antica Fiera del Rosario and Lessinia Terra dei Saponi** – the third Sunday in October, in Breonio

Market fair selling organic and natural farm products; local craftsmanship and folklore; chance to sample speciality foods made from organic ingredients.

**Christmas markets in Cavalo** – mid-December

Christmas village featuring typical craftsmanship and produce, and the chance to taste some speciality foods.





# GLOSSARY

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Page 14 - Parco delle Cascate di Molina  
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website: [www.laviadelleprealpi.it/it/escursione-sulle-colline-di-fumane](http://www.laviadelleprealpi.it/it/escursione-sulle-colline-di-fumane)

Page 16 - Pro loco tourist association of Breonio  
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Page 16 - Biodiversity Bridges Project  
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