

# SWISS CUSTOMS MUSEUM

SCHWEIZER ZOLLMUSEUM  
MUSEO DELLE DOGANE SVIZZERO  
MUSEE SUISSE DES DOUANES

## Federal Customs

### Administration FCA

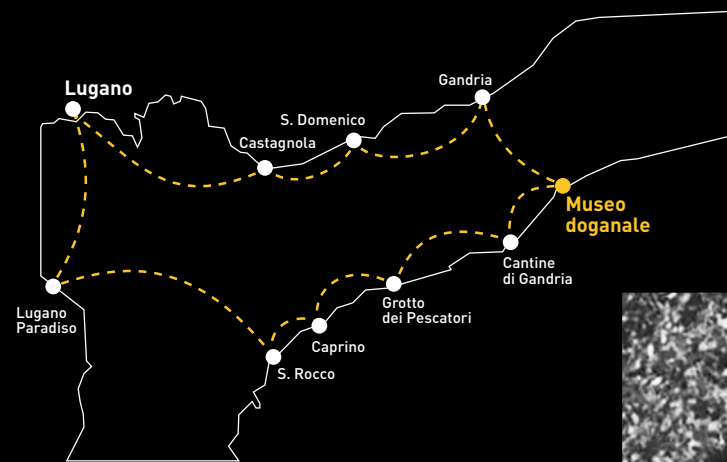
Swiss Customs Museum  
Cantine di Gandria, Lugano  
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## Opening hours

Tue – Sun, from 12 am to 5 pm

For further information see:  
[www.customsmuseum.admin.ch](http://www.customsmuseum.admin.ch)

Free entrance



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Bundesamt für Zoll und Grenzsicherheit BAZG  
Office fédéral de la douane et de la sécurité des frontières OFDF  
Ufficio federale della dogana e della sicurezza dei confini UDSC  
Uffizi federal da la duana e da la segirezza dals cunfins UDSC  
Federal Office for Customs and Border Security FOCBS



A temporary  
exhibition on  
smugglers and  
refugees  
between Italy  
and Switzerland  
during the  
Second  
World War

Reopening  
10 April  
2022







## THE INGENUITY OF THE SMUGGLERS

The creativity of the smugglers knew no bounds: in 1948, a homemade wooden submarine encased in metal was seized. It was three metres long and had a carrying capacity of 450kg. The “pocket-sized submarine of Ceresio” was powered by pedals!



## THE CAPRINO REGISTER

The original register of refugees who arrived at the Caprino border post, where the Customs Museum is now located, is on display in one of the rooms. According to current research, this is the only document of its kind in Switzerland. It tells us about the refugees who sought refuge from persecution in Wehrmacht-occupied Italy. Dramatic, adventurous and moving stories that make us question and reflect on asylum in general and the Holocaust in particular.

## SMUGGLERS AND REFUGEES

The border with Italy was by far the area which saw the most intense levels of smuggling. The exhibition traces the history of smuggling, focusing on its most memorable period: the Second World War. Spared from the expansionist ambitions of the menacing Axis powers, Switzerland was literally invaded by an army of smugglers. Men, women and even children from the Italian border villages saw this tough and dangerous activity as a means of alleviating their difficult financial situations.



In those turbulent years, with the centre-north of Italy occupied by the Wehrmacht and ravaged by civil war, thousands of military and civil refugees, especially politicians and Jews, poured into Switzerland. Around 26,000 military and 12,000 civilian refugees were granted entry into Ticino and Mesolcina, of whom around 4,500 were Jews. But many people were also turned away. Some of the Jews who were refused entry were arrested and deported to Auschwitz, from where few returned.



Smuggler dogs were introduced at the end of the 19th century. Man's loyal friend was trained to cross specific routes carrying a small pack weighing between 5kg and 10kg. The Italian border guards had orders to shoot the poor animals and killed hundreds of them. From the 1930s onwards, however, many dogs were found working on the other side, alongside the border guards.



## THE BORDER FENCE

In order to combat smuggling, the Italian border guards built an impressive border fence network in the 1880s. The “ramina”, as it is known in Ticino, had an ingenious alarm system consisting of bells attached with special springs, ready to raise the alarm if anyone tried to cross the border illegally.

