

Italy: Portofino & Cinque Terre

Tour-Only Itinerary

In the northwest of Italy, within the Italian Riviera, stands a string of pastel-hued villages linked by ancient coastal and mountain paths. The “Five Lands” of the captivating Cinque Terre have enthralled adventurers since the ancient days of Dante. Follow these timeless trails on a Portofino and Cinque Terre hiking tour that takes you through crooked medieval streets and peaceful terraced gardens to spectacular seaside villages. You’ll journey across a rugged landscape of thrilling coastal views and cliffsides, enriching your adventure even further as you explore the dynamic, jet-set town of Portofino and the ramparts of medieval Lucca. During this grand tour you’ll stay in comfort at exceptional hotels, dining on fresh seafood and delectable local fare while raising glasses of fine Italian wine.



Highlights

- Cross the Gulf of the Poets—which once inspired Byron, Shelley, and Petrarch—in a vintage wooden speedboat as sunset paints the coast, and toast the view with a chilled aperitivo.
- Relish the culinary experience of a lifetime in a local restaurant whose acclaimed chef serves fresh seafood from the neighboring docks.
- Walk to a medieval abbey above the Bay of Fruttuoso before reaching the jet-set resort of Portofino, rewarding yourself with *paciugo*, a blend of gelato and fresh berries.
- Stroll medieval ramparts in Lucca, an ancient Tuscan city nestled in a fertile plain on the river Serchio.

On all Flex-Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Opportunities to break away from the group and explore on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 20 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious multi-course meals—a majority are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Flex-Guided Adventures, rated moderate with challenging sections. This tour is more of a hiking experience than a walking experience. You should be in excellent physical condition with good balance and no orthopedic or cardiovascular conditions. While hikes average 3 to 5 miles per day, elevation gains and losses range up to 1,500 feet. Please note that the Cinque Terre region is characterized by terrain that varies greatly: there are very few stretches of flat walking; therefore you will be ascending, descending, or walking on rolling, rocky paths daily. Some days include lengthy ascents ranging from 30 to 45 minutes, beginning with 10 to 20 minutes of steep stair climbing on high stone steps. The hiking trails level out for periods and then descend steeply, also over stone steps. Your hikes take you

over trails that can be: rocky with loose gravel; hard-packed dirt; uneven, stone steps; and pine needle-covered dirt paths through wooded areas. Some of the hikes are exposed, with little coverage from the sun, which, depending upon the temperature, can increase the challenge of this tour. A walking stick is recommended, even if you do not usually use one. The pace on this tour is leisurely with stops en route to explore villages, visit historical sites, or to swim in the Ligurian Sea. This tour incorporates the use of local rail and public ferries to customize the walks and provide efficient travel between the destinations where we stay. As one of our Flex-Guided tours, some days offer options for self-exploration, cultural visits, or free time to relax on your own.

DAY 1

Join your *Italy: Portofino & Cinque Terre* tour

Walking tour of Lucca; 2-4 miles, easy

Your guide(s) meet you at 9:00 a.m. in the lobby of the Hotel Balestri in Florence. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

You meet your guides and fellow travelers this morning in Florence and transfer to Lucca, a stunningly preserved Tuscan town surrounded by remarkably intact medieval walls. Henry James famously described this treasure as “overflowing with everything.” During its Renaissance heyday, Lucca grew rich on the supply and production of silk. On arrival, you embark on a walking tour of the town’s charming cobbled streets, its handsome piazzas, and along its majestic fortified city walls that today host a park-like promenade for residents and visitors. You pause at a locally favored restaurant for a delicious welcome lunch of handmade pasta and salads before continuing to the Roman-Byzantine town of Portovenere. This charming city enjoys a spectacular setting between the azure sea and the nearby Apuan Alps. Its tall, narrow pastel-hued houses strike a colorful pose along an inviting waterfront promenade. Perhaps the town’s most dramatic site is the San Pietro Gothic church, a 13th-century gem adorned in black and white stone stripes typical of its day. Perched high on a rocky cape overlooking the sea, it has long been a beloved landmark overlooking the spectacular Golfo dei Poeti (Gulf of Poets). The gulf is so named because many writers, including Dante, Petrarch, Byron, and Shelley, have sung its praises—even the boats in the harbor sport romantic names inspired by these poets. Upon arrival, you settle into your hotel and rejoin your group for a brief boat transfer to a special dining venue, where you enjoy a sumptuous feast of freshly caught seafood.

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel Paradiso, Portovenere

DAY 2

Isola Palmaria and free afternoon in Portovenere

2.5 miles, easy to moderate, 1,200-ft. elevation gain and loss

Following breakfast on the terrace overlooking the sea, you begin the day's adventure with a scenic boat ride in the bay that culminates at Isola Palmaria. This beautiful island, declared a Natural Regional Park, boasts a network of walking paths with stunning viewpoints of its dramatic cliffs and nearby Tino Island. Disembarking in the small harbor of Terrizzo, home to the island's few homes and a restaurant, an easy 20-minute walk leads you to the meticulously restored 19th-century fortress of Umberto I, which now houses a museum dedicated to the oceanography and undersea archaeology of the Mediterranean. From this spectacular viewpoint, the trail gently ascends into a sea of terraced olive groves before leveling off through a forest of holm oak and pinewood. The air is perfumed by sage, broom, and myrtle underfoot as you approach the southern tip of the island. Here lush Mediterranean vegetation is replaced by steep rocky cliffs, deep ravines, and abandoned quarries of the golden-veined black Portoro marble – now home to wild goats and an extensive colony of herring gulls. A challenging, yet short (20-minute), climb leads to the summit where you are rewarded with unsurpassed 360-degree views.

After a snack and water break, a 45-minute descent by way of an asphalt road or a more challenging dirt trail returns you to the hamlet of Terrizzo, where your boat is waiting. Time and weather permitting, you cruise around the island to explore several wonderful grottoes—the famous Grotta Azzurra (Blue Grotto), the Grotta Vulcanica, a volcanic grotto housing an ancient freshwater spring, and the Grotta dei Colombi, where Paleolithic evidence was discovered in the 19th century.

Upon your return to Portovenere, a free afternoon invites you to embark on an independent lunch and afternoon activity of your choice in this UNESCO World Heritage site.

Reconvene this evening at your hotel where you enjoy another delicious meal featuring the bounty of the region.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel Paradiso, Portovenere

DAY 3

Campiglia to Telegrafo via San Antonio

2 miles, easy to moderate. Telegrafo to Riomaggiore; 3 miles, moderate to challenging, 1,475-ft. elevation gain and loss

This morning a short transfer brings you to the town of Campiglia. Situated on the ridge of the western promontory of the Gulf of La Spezia, (at approximately 1,200 feet above the sea), it is also the starting point for the Cinque Terre National Park trails linking Portovenere to Monterosso. The “Five Lands” of the Cinque Terre are Monterosso al Mare, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola, and Riomaggiore: five small, remote villages strung along the coast northwest of La Spezia. They are linked by boat, rail, and footpaths, allowing you to customize your walking experience over the next two days. With breathtaking panoramas over the islands of Palmaria and Tino and across the coast, Campiglia also features a 14th-century church and an ancient windmill (located just outside the village). Descending from the village, your trail traces an easy track through cork oak trees, and along undulating terrain until you reach San Antonio. After another half hour, you reach Telegrafo, from where an optional walk continues to Riomaggiore.

Enjoy lunch on your own in Riomaggiore, the southernmost town—recognizable by its characteristic tower homes—or in Manarola, a cozy, classic seaside town and the center of Cinque Terre’s wine production. Afterward, you reunite with the group to travel by train to Monterosso. On arrival to Monterosso, you walk the short distance to your home-away-from-home, located just steps away from the best beach in town. At this popular sandy beach, it’s possible to rent a paddle boat or kayak, stroll the seafront promenade, or simply enjoy a swim in the sea. After settling into your room reconvene for a delicious dinner of locally caught seafood accompanied by a glass of *vermentino* from a nearby vineyard.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel Palme, Monterosso

DAY 4

Monterosso to Vernazza

2.5 miles, moderate to challenging, 700-ft. elevation gain and loss

After breakfast, perhaps enjoyed on the outdoor terrace, you set off on a stunning trail to nearby Vernazza, one of the most charming towns in the Cinque Terre, accessible by boat, rail, or trail. (Please note that your guides may choose to begin the walk in Vernazza and finish in Monterosso.) Arguably the most spectacular trail through the picturesque “Five Lands,” you trace a well-established footpath offering views of the turquoise sea. After an initial lengthy climb up a steep cliffside stairway of several hundred steps, the trail winds up and down through groves of lemon, orange, and olive trees and beautifully terraced vineyards supported by hundreds of miles of hand-built drystone walls. Known as *mura a secco*, these walls are a testament to the centuries of labor involved in shaping this fascinating landscape. Traversing extremely narrow trails—perched on terraces with a wall on one side and a drop of 10 to 15 feet on the other—you pass farmers at work using monorail systems to transport grapes and supplies up and down the steep hillsides. *(Please note: due to the fragile nature of the Cinque Terre landscape, these trails may be closed in the event of inclement weather or to accommodate necessary repairs. In such circumstances, a comparable walk will be offered.)*

A special meal rewards your efforts, and late afternoon you transfer via rail to a seaside resort and your home for the final three nights of the tour. Dinner is on your own this evening, with recommendations from your guides.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodation: Hotel Metropole, Santa Margherita Ligure

DAY 5

Santa Margherita Ligure to Portofino. Independent exploration of Portofino, Santa Margherita, or nearby village.

5 miles, easy to moderate, 885-ft. elevation gain and loss

This morning you linger over a leisurely breakfast and cappuccino at your elegant seaside resort accommodations. Departing from your hotel on foot, you enjoy a scenic walk to the chic resort of Portofino.

Your trail traces the seaside promenade and climbs above town. From the charming sanctuary of the Madonna della Neve (situated at 500 feet above sea level), a 10-minute ascent over the luxuriant green hillside, followed by a short level stretch, brings you to the hamlet of Gave and its restored chapel, the Oratorio di San Gerolamo. From here you enjoy a wonderful view over the Abbey of Cervara, an Italian national monument dating to the 14th century, before continuing on to Portofino in one of two directions—the route decided upon by your guide(s).

The first option rewards you with an easy walk along a shaded, cobbled path past farmhouses, through terraced olive groves down to Paraggi, a tiny coastal town bordered by a beautiful sandy beach. A paved promenade, shaded beneath the canopy of a holm oak forest, winds along the sea, delivering you to the cobblestoned streets of Portofino.

The alternative option departs the hamlet of Gave along an undulating path before reaching Acqua Morta and Acqua Viva, two small streams, the second so-called because it gave life to a series of 35 olive, chestnut, and wheat mills (one of which is now a visitors' center), while the former did not have any mills along its course. Reaching Olmi, the highest point of today's walk at 885 feet, you begin the long descent down a paved path into Portofino, passing by the chapel of San Sebastiano and enjoying splendid views along the way.

The picturesque village of Portofino, nestled into a cove between hills, was rediscovered by the jet set shortly after World War II and is considered to be among the most beautiful Mediterranean ports. Where once only fishing boats docked in the emerald-green inlet, now yachts arrive from around the world. After a tasty lunch, the afternoon (and evening) are free to enjoy an activity of your choice in Portofino, Santa Margherita, or one of the neighboring villages, along with dinner on your own with recommendations from your guides.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodation: Hotel Metropole, Santa Margherita Ligure

DAY 6

Ruta to San Fruttuoso

3.5 miles, moderate to challenging, 750-ft. elevation gain and 1,500-ft. elevation loss. Additional option of

San Fruttuoso to Portofino; 3 miles, moderate to challenging

After a satisfying breakfast of coffee, eggs, cheese, yogurt, and fruit, you transfer by public bus to the tiny and picturesque village of Ruta. Here, you enter the Regional Park of Portofino for an approximately four-hour morning walk. Your initial 45-minute, 500-foot undulating yet steady ascent along a shady trail is punctuated by a series of rough steps. Along the spectacular ridgeline trail, enjoy commanding views of the Bay of Tigullio to the east and the Bay of Paradise and city of Genova to the west. Continuing beneath a canopy of chestnut, pine, and oak trees, you traverse the Portofino promontory—ascending 160 feet over a 40-minute period—and arrive at Semaforo Nuovo (“New Signal Station”). At 1,300 feet, you are rewarded with radiant coastal views. Refueled with a snack and water break, you set off on a beautiful cliffside path overlooking the Cala dell’Oro Bay and the Bay of San Fruttuoso. The dirt trail—bordered by fragrant Mediterranean *macchia*, myrtle, and berries—gently climbs and descends for just over an hour, at which point you reach Pietre Strette (“Narrow Stones”), an area of narrow canyons surrounding the 1,500-foot summit of the forested ridge. Over the next hour you descend several stony switchbacks and old mule paths to sea level and the hamlet of San Fruttuoso. This secluded haven, which can only be reached on foot or by boat, is picturesquely situated in a small, rocky cove. Under ownership and protection of the National Trust of Italy, San Fruttuoso has recently begun the process toward recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Following an optional swim in the inviting clear blue waters of the San Fruttuoso Bay, you sit down to a much-anticipated lunch—perhaps a fresh green salad along with the region’s signature dish, homemade pasta with pesto. Following lunch, you may accompany your guide(s) on a fascinating visit to the Abbazia di San Fruttuoso, a 10th-century medieval abbey. This afternoon, you may choose to continue on a scenic two-hour walk to Portofino, or return by boat back to Santa Margherita (with a possible stop in Portofino should you wish).

This evening, you reunite for a delectable farewell feast beginning with bountiful seafood *antipasti* and followed perhaps by the classical Ligurian *primo*, *pansoti con salsa di noci* (cheese-filled pasta topped with walnut sauce).

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel Metropole, Santa Margherita Ligure

DAY 7

Your *Italy: Portofino & Cinque Terre* tour concludes

Ciao! After breakfast, conclude your Portofino and Cinque Terre walking tour with a transfer to Genoa. Stay on to further explore this UNESCO port city, or depart for your onward travels.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except 2 lunches and 2 dinners	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓