

## Italy: Genoa & the Cinque Terre

### Tour-Only Itinerary

Experience the allure of the Italian Riviera, with its sweeping coastal views, pastel-hued seaside homes, and dramatic, terraced vineyards on this Cinque Terre self-guided walking tour. Begin at Genoa's historic waterfront, then move on to panoramic sea views in tranquil Sestri Levante. Hike to rural villages through cork-oak forests and fragrant citrus groves. Marvel at the towering seaside cliffs of Vernazza, and delight in the chic harbor-town of Portofino. Throughout your journey, a multitude of trains and ferries allow you to set your own walking schedule. Fuel your tour with delectable Italian fare including fresh seafood and locally made pesto while staying at comfortable hotels along your route. Clifftop hikes, coastal trails, and village strolls reveal the timeless beauty of Italy's Cinque Terre region.

### Highlights

Follow paths through cork-oak forests along the sea, passing through citrus and olive groves as you make your way from charming Manarola to picturesque Vernazza.

Learn to make a local favorite and the region's most acclaimed specialty—pesto—during a hands-on cooking class with an expert chef.

Stay in an aristocratic villa in the ancient port town of Sestri Levante, overlooking both the Bay of Silence and the Bay of Fables.

Take advantage of the Cinque Terre's extensive train and ferry system to tweak and modify your itinerary at will.

## Activity Level

This tour is one of our Self-Guided Walking Adventures, rated moderate with challenging sections. This tour is more of a hiking than a walking experience. You should be in excellent physical condition with good balance and no orthopedic or cardiovascular conditions. While hikes only average 2 to 4 miles per day, there are significant daily ascents and descents up to 1,200 feet on steep paths and steps. The Cinque Terre region is characterized by extremely hilly and rocky terrain and very few stretches of flat walking. Ascents range 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 of time and then descend steeply, also over stone steps. The terrain is mainly single-track trails, rocky with loose gravel. Paths are sometimes cobbled, hard-packed dirt, uneven stone steps, and pine needle-covered dirt through wooded areas, and occasionally paved. The itinerary includes three different Natural Protected Areas: Portofino, Punta Manara, and Cinque Terre. Most of the hikes are in oak and pine forests, through rugged hills dotted with Mediterranean herbs and shrubs, terraced farmland, and hillside vineyards. Some of the hikes have little coverage from the sun, which, depending upon the temperature, can increase the challenge of this tour. Despite the paths being along the coast, they are well protected by vegetation and vertigo is not an issue, except in the Cinque Terre National Park, where a second option is available. A walking stick is highly recommended, even if you do not usually use one. There are no easier walking options available except for very short strolls in towns or on flat promenades by the sea. However, the availability of local trains and boats provides plenty of flexibility and opportunities to skip the walks and explore the authentic fishing villages or bustling towns of the Italian Riviera, visit historical sites, or, depending on the time of year, to swim in the Ligurian Sea. Remember: preparation is the key to ensuring your tour readiness; the more you walk or participate in aerobic exercise prior to your trip, the more you will enjoy your experience!

## DAY 1

### Arrival in Genoa. Orientation meeting at 6:30 p.m

You arrive in the port city of Genoa, where you make your way to your centrally located hotel. With its storied history—rivaling that of Venice—of Mediterranean rule from the Middle Ages through the 16th century, Genoa's wealth and importance are evident throughout. The city's magnificent medieval cathedral and Renaissance palaces—the Palazzi dei Rolli—a collection of 42 stunning buildings in the city's historical center, have been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in their entirety. Following an

orientation meeting, a short walk from your hotel brings you to a favorite local restaurant for dinner.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Bristol Palace, Genoa

**Included Meals:** Dinner

## DAY 2

### Gulf of Paradise. Camogli and/or Genoa exploration

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

This first walk on the itinerary takes you outside Genoa to the western side of the Natural Park of Portofino, the peninsula south of the city reaching into the Mediterranean to form the Gulf of Paradise. A very short train ride (approximately 25 minutes) takes you from Genoa to the fishing port town of Camogli, where you head out on a steep brick path to reach one of the park's main gates in the tiny hamlet of San Rocco—one of the best vantage points in the area, with stunning views of the coast and distant mountains. From there, you descend a panoramic walkway through lush gardens and elegant villas to the seaside at Punta Chiappa, a unique geological formation jutting into the water. You can find a scenic picnic spot not far from fishermen's nets, or opt to dine at a seaside trattoria, before returning to Camogli by boat. You may then choose to explore charming Camogli with its medieval tower and baroque church, or catch the train directly back to Genoa. Continuing your discovery of Genoa, you may choose to ride the historical funicular that climbs to the city's 17th-century defensive city walls. For dinner, choose from the many restaurants in the city's historical center.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Bristol Palace, Genoa

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 3

### Transfer to Sestri Levante. Punta Manara. Sestri Levante exploration

4 miles, easy to moderate, 800-ft. elevation gain and loss

You depart Genoa today and transfer about 30 miles south along the coast to the town of Sestri Levante.

An ancient port and trading center, the town is a small peninsula that was actually once an island before being connected to the mainland in Roman times. The walk today takes you from the town center to the Cape of Punta Manara, providing views along the way of its two beautiful gulfs: The Bay of Silence and the Bay of Fables, the latter named for Hans Christian Andersen, who lived here for a short time in the 1830s. The route ascends the cape along an old mule track that turns to dirt with a few short steep parts, emerging at the promontory with a small medieval tower and gorgeous coastal views. You can return via a trail through typical Mediterranean flora and forest of pine and oak, or retrace your steps to enjoy the panorama in the opposite direction. Once back in Sestri Levante, there are many options—a stroll along the main promenade overlooking the Portofino Peninsula, a visit to the local cultural museum, or a swim and rest at the beach. This evening you walk to a favorite local restaurant for a pesto cooking class, followed by dinner.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Due Mari, Sestri Levante

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner (and Pesto Cooking Class)

## DAY 4

### Santa Margherita–Nozarego–Portofino loop. Santa Margherita and Portofino exploration

3.9 miles, easy to moderate, 850-ft. elevation gain and 800-ft. elevation loss

Today's walk highlights the eastern side of the Portofino Peninsula, facing the Tigullio Gulf. A short train ride takes you to the resort town of Santa Margherita Ligure with its ornate baroque church and the English Romantic gardens of Villa Durazzo. From the bustling seaside promenade of Santa Margherita, you ascend gently along an old pilgrims' trail to Nozarego and to the hamlet of Gave with its restored chapel of San Girolamo. The path then follows the "valley of mills," with its many streams and small summer houses, where olives, chestnuts, and corn were ground. Reaching the Mulino del Gassetta, you can stop for a drink or a snack in this restored mill and view its original grinding stone and wine press. Next on the route is Olmi, the walk's highest point at nearly 900 feet. From here, you begin a long descent into Portofino, passing by the chapel of Saint Sebastiano with more splendid views. Portofino, once a small fishing village and now a well-known luxury yacht harbor, captivates with its many pastel-colored houses, the church of Saint George on the cliff, Castello Brown, and the lighthouse at its tip. From Portofino, you can choose to return to Santa Margherita by ferry or public bus or on foot to Paraggi,

walking along the main promenade and then coming back full circle to the center of Santa Margherita, before catching the train back to Sestri Levante.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Due Mari, Sestri Levante

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 5

### Levanto to Monterosso al Mare OR Levanto-Bonassola loop. Levanto and Monterosso al Mare or Bonassola exploration

5.6 miles, moderate, 1,200-ft. elevation gain and loss OR 5 miles, easy to moderate, 1,100-ft. elevation gain and loss

Today you begin your exploration of the Cinque Terre National Park, a designated UNESCO World Heritage site, choosing from several options. You depart Sestri Levante by train (your luggage is transferred separately) for Levanto, a medieval town on the border of the national park. A short walk around the town is highly recommended to visit the remains of the 13th-century port, the church of Saint Andrew, and the historical center. From Levanto, you have two options that both showcase the Cinque Terre's fabulous scenery. For the moderate walk, you reach the ruins of Levanto's castle and start off on the path to Punta Mesco, which eventually levels off along an easy stretch with spectacular views. You then have another rigorous ascent over rough steps through oak forest, followed by a much easier stretch through a pine forest, culminating at the promontory of Punta Mesco. At 1,000 feet, your hard work is rewarded with an amazing bird's-eye view of all five villages of the Cinque Terre, the sea shimmering before you. A final steep 45-minute descent on large stone steps delivers you to Monterosso al Mare, which features the Cinque Terre's only sandy beach. The easy-to-moderate option follows the main sea promenade of Levanto to the main path to Scernio, leading to a panoramic cape thick with olive trees and wild broom. Rounding the entire Bonassola Gulf, you emerge near the castle and railway station. After enjoying the tiny town of Bonassola, and one of the best beaches of the area, you loop back to Levanto along an easy, flat path – a former railway line. From Levanto or Monterosso, a short train ride brings you to charming Manarola, your home for two nights. Dinner is just around the corner at a family-run trattoria known for its fresh local seafood.

**Accommodation:** Da Baranin B&B, Manarola

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 6

### Vernazza to Corniglia. Vernazza and Corniglia exploration

2.7 miles, moderate with challenging sections, 600-ft. elevation gain and loss

Today's walk is dedicated to exploration of the Cinque Terre National Park, established in 1999 to protect the landscape, environment, and unique culture of this region. First, you take a short train ride to Vernazza, one of the most striking of the five towns, and walk to the old monastery and to the pier. Then, the trail from Vernazza to Corniglia begins with a steep ascent up a set of stone steps before leveling off along terraced vineyards clinging to seaside cliffs. You continue on the narrow trail for approximately two hours before reaching Corniglia, the most untouched of the Cinque Terre villages. Unlike the other villages of the Cinque Terre, Corniglia is not right on the sea, rather it sits on a promontory more than 300 feet above the sea, surrounded on three sides by vineyards and terraces, while the fourth side plunges to the water. From Corniglia, you may choose to walk down to the waterfront and take a train to Manarola or Riomaggiore, the southernmost town, with its houses pitched steeply on the rocks above its harbors, from where you can see the famous Via dell'Amore (often translated as "Lovers' Lane"). The tradition of painting the houses of the Cinque Terre towns in various pastel hues was for the local men, usually sailors and fishermen, to recognize their homes from sea. Your hosts suggest a favorite restaurant at which to enjoy a final dinner, savoring the fresh and flavorful Ligurian cuisine.

**Accommodation:** Da Baranin B&B, Manarola

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 7

### Departure from La Spezia

After breakfast, a 30-minute transfer takes you to La Spezia's central train station for onward travels.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## What's Included

### Tour Only

Boutique accommodations

9 meals: 6 breakfasts and 3 dinners

Detailed water- and tear-resistant Route Notes and maps

Orientation meeting with a Country Walkers representative

Local representative available 24/7

Scheduled taxi and luggage transfers (Please note: If unable to walk, it is possible to transfer with your luggage from one accommodation to the next at no additional charge.)

Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary: Pesto cooking class; week-long regional train pass; two-day Cinque Terre Train Card (provides unlimited train and path access within the Cinque Terre National Park).

Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7

Access to Self-Guided Flight Concierge—Ask our knowledgeable team to find flights that sync perfectly with your planned trip.