

Italy: Genoa & the Cinque Terre

Tour-Only Itinerary

Arriving in a place accessible only on foot is every hiker's dream, so your current spot overlooking Vernazza is as good as it gets. Directly below, tightly stacked pastel-hued houses rise from the harbor, all backed by the blue-green Mediterranean. You're walking village to village through the Cinque Terre: five historic seaside towns linked only by train, boat, and trail. Following a former mule path cut between ancient drystone walls, you climb coastal bluffs, passing through olive orchards, lemon groves, and lovingly tended grapevines. Outside Corniglia, locals bear baskets overflowing with newly harvested grapes, and your thoughts turn to wine. Perfect timing. There's a sunny enoteca terrace just round the bend, and the views couldn't be better.



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.

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



A local representative
available 24/7.



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



Detailed maps & route notes
featuring turn-by-turn
directions and places of
interest.



Experts to handle all the
details, including moving
your luggage between hotels
while you're out exploring.



Scheduled taxi transfers to
bring you to and from each
day's walks.



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



Delicious meals—many
are included.

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

Your Italy: Genoa & the Cinque Terre tour begins. Arrival Day

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 Palazzi dei Rolli, a collection of 42 medieval cathedrals and Renaissance palaces in the city's historical center, has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in its entirety. Following an orientation meeting, step out to dinner on your own.

DAY 2

Gulf of Paradise. Camogli and/or Genoa exploration. Stay Put Day

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

The first walk on your itinerary takes you outside Genoa to the western side of the Natural Park of Portofino. The Park occupies a peninsula south of the city that reaches into the Mediterranean to form the Gulf of Paradise.

A 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 ascending to one of the park's main gates in the tiny hamlet of San Rocco. Reaching the park, you have 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 wish 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, pick from the many restaurants in the city's historical center.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3

Travel to Sestri Levante. Punta Manara. Sestri Levante exploration. Move on Day

3.9 miles, easy to moderate, 900-ft. elevation gain and loss

You depart Genoa today and are driven about 30 miles south along the coast to the town of Sestri Levante. An ancient port and trading center, the town is on a small peninsula that was once an island before it was 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 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 a promontory with a small medieval tower and gorgeous coastal views.

You can return via a trail through typical Mediterranean flora and a 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4

Santa Margherita–Nozarego–Portofino loop. Santa Margherita and Portofino exploration. Stay Put Day

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

This morning's walk highlights the eastern side of the Portofino Peninsula, facing the Tigullio Gulf. A short train ride delivers you to the resort town of Santa Margherita Ligure, home to an ornate Baroque church and the Romantic English gardens of Villa Durazzo. From the bustling seaside promenade of Santa Margherita, you ascend gently along a historical pilgrims' trail to Nozarego to the hamlet of Gave with its restored chapel of San Girolamo. The path then follows the "valley of mills," with many streams and small summer houses, where olives, chestnuts, and corn were ground, giving the valley its name. Reaching the Mulino del Gassetta, a restored mill, you can stop for a drink or a snack 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 famous 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5

Levanto to Monterosso al Mare or Levanto-Bonassola loop. Levanto and Monterosso al Mare or Bonassola exploration. Optional Manarola Vineyard Walk. Move on Day

5.6 miles, moderate, 1,300-ft. elevation gain and 1,250-ft elevation loss; or 5.2 miles, easy to moderate, 1,000-ft. elevation gain and loss. Optional walk: 0.9 miles, easy, 200-ft. elevation gain and loss

Begin your exploration of the Cinque Terre National Park, a designated UNESCO World Heritage site, where you can choose from several options. You depart Sestri Levante by train (your luggage is transported separately) for Levanto, a medieval town on the border of the national park. A short walk around the town is highly recommended, to take in 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 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 and 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 and leads to Scernio and 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.

Arriving from either Levanto or Monterosso, take a short train ride to charming Manarola, where you'll stay for two nights. For a leisurely and brief walk, consider exploring the Manarola Vineyard Walk either this evening or tomorrow. This tranquil path winds through terraced grape vineyards with a wooden railing, guiding you to Punta Bonfigio cemetery and park in approximately 20 minutes, providing captivating sea views. Beyond the cemetery walls, you'll find a playground and flower garden extending to the cliff's edge, featuring a sculpture symbolizing the town's lifeline—a woman draped in grapes.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6

Vernazza to Corniglia. Vernazza and Corniglia exploration. Stay Put Day

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

Today's walk is dedicated to the exploration of 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 then to the pier.

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, instead 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 latter is the southernmost town of the five, and features houses pitched on the rocks above its harbors. The famous Via dell'Amore (often translated as "Lovers' Lane") connects the town of Manarola to Riomaggiore. When the trail was built, it became a meeting place for couples from the two towns.

The tradition of painting the houses of the Cinque Terre towns in various pastel hues was so the local men, usually sailors and fishermen, could recognize their homes from the sea.

Your Route Notes will suggest a favorite restaurant at which to enjoy a farewell dinner, savoring the fresh and flavorful Ligurian cuisine.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7

Your Italy: Genoa & the Cinque Terre tour concludes

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

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

Boutique accommodations	✓
7 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts and 1 dinner	✓
Detailed water- and tear-resistant Route Notes and maps	✓
Orientation meeting with a Country Walkers representative	✓
Local representative available 24/7	✓
Scheduled on-tour taxi and luggage transportation (Please note: If unable to walk, it is possible to travel 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)	✓