

Cinque Terre

and the Riviera di Levante • 50 long and short walks



GPS

This is a sample from the
PDF edition of
Landscapes of the
**CINQUE
TERRE**
and Riviera di Levante

a countryside guide
Second edition



Georg Henke

This shorter sampler includes some of the introductory text, the introductions to each of the main sections (Picnicking, Car Touring and Walking) with an example of each. There is a total of 136 pages, plus a pull-out region map, in the full book.



SUNFLOWER BOOKS



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Getting there and getting about

Northwestern Italy is well served by two international airports: Milan's Malpensa in Lombardy and Pisa's Galileo Galilei in Tuscany, whereas there are very few arrivals from abroad at Liguria's main airport, Cristoforo Colombo in Genoa. But there *are* daily direct flights from London Gatwick (BA) and Stanstead (Ryanair) to **Genoa**. From the airport there's a shuttle bus (*volabus*) every 30 to 45 minutes to the main railway stations of Piazza Principe and Brignole, crossing the city centre. From Piazza Principe station it takes about 1h10min by intercity train or 1h30min by regional train to Monterosso in the Cinque Terre.

From **Pisa** the Cinque Terre can easily be reached by train via La Spezia. All year round there are direct flights to Pisa from London Heathrow (BA), Gatwick (Easyjet and Ryanair), Stanstead (Ryanair) and Bristol (Easyjet). In summer there is also a non-stop Delta flight four times a week from New York's JFK. From Pisa's airport frequent buses make the 10-minute run to the central railway station from 6 am till midnight. It takes about an hour by fast train to La Spezia, where you have to change to a local train serving the five villages.

Milan's large Malpensa airport receives the widest range of non-stop air services from the UK. There are also direct flights from several places in the States. Once there, a bus leaves the airport for the inner city and the central railway station (Milano Centrale) every 20 minutes from 5 am till midnight. Then it's about 1h40min to Genoa and the good west coast main line travels on towards La Spezia, frequently serving all the coastal towns and villages featuring in this book.

There are different sorts of trains: fast Frecciabianca heading for Rome, slightly slower intercity trains from Milano Centrale to Pisa/Livorno which stop more frequently, and regional trains (*treno regionale*) — some stopping only at the bigger stations, but most running at a snail's pace and stopping nearly everywhere. In all,

Monterosso Beach

about 15 faster Frecciabianca or intercity trains run from Milan to Pisa and Rome via Genoa and La Spezia, most of which stop at Rapallo and Chiavari en route. About six intercity trains also stop at Santa Margherita Ligure, Sestri Levante, Levanto and Monterosso. Monterosso is the only station of the Cinque Terre served by fast trains (three hours from Milan).



For those coming from Asia or Australia, **Rome's** Fiumicino Airport has the widest choice of flights. Then the fast Leonardo Express runs non-stop from the airport to the central railway station (Roma Central), which has about eight trains a day to Pisa, La Spezia and Genoa. It takes about 3h45min from Rome up to La Spezia.

There is about one regional train per hour along the coastal main line, and more between Sestri Levante and Genoa. From May to October there are additional connections from Levanto to La Spezia serving the villages of the Cinque Terre. Fares on regional trains are low (except between Levanto and La Spezia, see page 18); they are more costly on the Frecciabianca and intercity trains, but still reasonable (except for very short distances). For Frecciabianca and intercity trains you need to reserve seats in advance (normally one can do this in the stations and at short notice). Timetables and pre-booking from abroad are offered on www.trenitalia.com.

Public buses are only of local importance, especially between Sestri Levante and La Spezia, where only a few short lines connect the inland villages to the railway stations. There are more frequent buses to the north of Sestri Levante, heading towards Genoa and around La Spezia Bay. Buses are as cheap as local trains but often much slower.

More details on public transport, timetables and rail lines are given overleaf, in the introductory notes for each area and at the start of the walks themselves.

Public transport

All the walks in this book can be reached by public transport. Most of them require the use of trains, buses or boats, as they are linear. Details of bus/train/boat timetables are given for each walk (valid at the time of writing).

In Italy timings change at least twice a year — in mid-June when the summer timetable (*orario estivo*) begins, and in mid-September with the start of the winter timetable (*orario invernale*). But timetables can change at short notice at any time, so the times given in the book can only be taken as an *approximation* of the public transport situation at a certain place.

To check up-to-date **bus timetables** on the web:

— for all lines from Levanto to Genoa go to

www.atpesercizio.it (*percorsi e orari*)

— for all lines from Levanto to La Spezia/Lerici go to

www.atcesercizio.it (*Visualizza il Libretto orario*)

Timetable translation hints:

Feriale: runs on workdays (Mon-Sat)

Feriale escl. Sabato or Lun-Ven: runs on workdays except Saturdays

Festivo: runs only on Sundays and public holidays

Before boarding a bus, get your ticket (*biglietto*) at small shops with a T-sign (*tabacchi*), at a bar or newspaper kiosk. Validate it by stamping it in the yellow box when boarding the vehicle. While you can often buy tickets from the bus drivers, it normally costs twice as much.

Many walks in the book require a short **train** ride. Validate each train ticket in one of the yellow or green automats at the railway station before boarding. Otherwise you may have to pay about 50 euros penalty for ticketless riding! Tickets for short rides can also be bought at automats, bars, kiosks and Cinque Terre National Park offices (at all railway stations from Levanto to La Spezia).

You can tell if you're facing in the right direction on the train platforms by looking at the signs to 'La Spezia' (southbound trains) and 'Genova' (northbound). In the Cinque Terre you may have to get off the train in a tunnel because the stations are so small! It is strictly forbidden to walk across the tracks; always use the underground passage (*sottopassaggio*). For online train timetables go to **www.trenitalia.com**.



Walking

Italians don't hike! Well, that's what everyone says anyway. But you'll see just how wrong they are when you visit the Cinque Terre on a sunny weekend — when there are not only walkers from abroad, but plenty of residents of Genoa, Milan and Bologna on these busy coastal trails. Until a few decades ago walking as a leisure activity was largely unknown in Italy outside the nature reserves in the Alps. But gradually a change of attitude has made itself felt throughout the country. Local residents have started to explore the scenic beauty of their native land, and in many places hiking routes have been waymarked and signposted. Today the Cinque Terre — and, to a lesser degree, the Portofino Peninsula — are among the most popular walking destinations in all Italy. So when you follow these well-worn trails there will almost always be other hikers about. By contrast, the trails in the other areas featured in this book are still quite empty.

Maps, waymarks, GPS

Nowadays various publishers produce **walking maps** (*Carta dei Sentieri*) at a scale of 1:25,000 covering the whole Riviera di Levante. Unfortunately these maps are only reliable when it comes to topography. In most cases the routes shown — whether paths, trails, tracks or even the smaller tarmac roads — are not fully up-to-date. Sometimes the bold red lines shown on the maps, which should indicate waymarked, well-established routes, turn out to be thickly overgrown or not to exist at all. Conversely, the maps may omit obvious trails.

The most appropriate hiking map for each of the walks in this book is mentioned in the introductory text. But the maps in this book, together with the walking notes, should be sufficient for your route-finding.

Nearly all walking trails on the Riviera di Levante are **waymarked** nowadays, and there are often signposts at intersections and forks. In the southern part of the area, to the south of Deiva Marina, the waymarks are nearly always double white stripes on a red ground, sometimes with the appropriate route number in black. In the northern part of the region waymarking usually

12 Landscapes of the Cinque Terre and Riviera di Levante

consists of different red symbols — squares, circles, dots, rhombi, crosses, etc. It is not always 100% reliable: sometimes the marks fade out in the middle of the walk, suddenly to reappear later, or the colour/style of way-marking may change en route for no obvious reason.

Because mapping and waymarking are not always reliable, I have tried to make my descriptions so comprehensive that you should be able to find your way *without* waymarks. Bear in mind, too, that some of my walks follow only *part of* a waymarked route, so *always refer to the description!* Waymarks on the ground at time of writing are mentioned, but I cannot guarantee that they will still be there in two or three years' time!

Free **GPS track** downloads are available for all the walks: see the Cinque Terre page on the Sunflower website.

When to walk

The Italian Riviera has a very mild climate, with temperatures rarely falling below zero. Except for the high Apennines, walking is possible all year round. **Spring** (April to mid-June) is the best season: temperatures are pleasant, many wild plants are in bloom, and often a clear blue sky arches above the sea and the mountains. **Autumn** (mid-September to the end of October) can be just as good as far as weather goes. But in both spring and autumn be prepared for rain every now and then, especially from April to mid-May and in October. In general any wet weather will not last very long. During high summer it's often very hot, and the only way to enjoy a walk is to start at sunrise and get back to base by noon at the latest.

It's also pleasant to walk from **November to March**, at least if you keep close to the coast, which sees less rainfall and higher temperatures than the mountains. Of course the weather will be unpredictable — it may rain for days on end or be fairly warm and sunny!

In the higher mountains of the **Apennines**, especially in the Aveto Nature Park, conditions are of course a bit different. You can even hike here in high summer, while in winter the ground — at a height of over 1000m — is often covered with snow.

Equipment

No special equipment is needed for any walk in this book, but good **walking boots** with sturdy soles and good ankle protection are highly recommended, as

Cinque Terre

a walkers' paradise



Riomaggiore

Probably nowhere else in Italy will you find a more scenic stretch of uncontaminated rugged coast as in the Cinque Terre to the north of La Spezia. Even today the ‘five lands’ — the villages of Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore — present an unspoilt image from the Mediterranean picture book. Nestled among steep slopes and cliffs above the crystal-blue sea, with their colourful houses, old churches and narrow alleyways, they seem to have been lost in time. Due to the steep and harsh terrain, the 20-kilometre-long shoreline between Levanto and Portovenere was for centuries only accessible by land on small cobbled mule trails. Thanks to their relative remoteness, they are still beautiful today.

The Cinque Terre has always been a region of vineyards. Because of the steep terrain the grapes can

only be cultivated on small terraces. These typical little vineyards have contributed to the creation of *terrazzamento*, a system of drystone retaining walls. There are several thousand kilometres of these walls, which prevent the precious soil from being washed down into the sea.

Today the beauty of the area is no longer an insiders' tip. From April to October masses of tourists come here, many of them from as far afield as New Zealand, China or Canada. Most of them are attracted by the superb hiking along the panoramic paths high above the sea. There's no tarmac road along the coast. But an extensive network of old, often beautifully cobbled trails stretches from coastal village to coastal village and up to the inland hamlets, houses and forests.

Luckily the tourist boom has left the picturesque appearance of the villages and surroundings untouched. But it has brought about an important social change: tourism, not viniculture, is now the main source of income. And this of course also affects the landscape. With wine-growing in decline, many of the vineyards are now abandoned — just broken walls and terraces overgrown with macchia and oak. Sooner or later the typical landscape of the *terrazzamento* will disappear. The creation of the **Cinque Terre National Park** in 1997 is an effort to stop this process of decline. For this reason you have to pay an entrance fee for the region's most popular coastal hike: from Monterosso to Riomaggiore. The fees are used to finance the expensive maintenance work on the terraces, walls and old paths. **There are Park information offices at all railway stations from Levanto to La Spezia**; they can give you details of rooms to let, railway timetables, and up-to-date path conditions; they also sell walking maps.

All five villages have their own character and flavour. **Monterosso al Mare** is a little less picturesque, but bigger and livelier than the other four, more a little town than a village. It has the widest range of hotels, restaurants and wine bars (*enotece*). It also offers the best swimming at its beautiful long sandy beach (shown on page 9). Monterosso is made up of two parts, the historic old town centre around **PIAZZA MATTEOTTI** and **PIAZZA GARIBALDI**, with some colourful narrow lanes, and the more modern **FEGINA** one kilometre to the west, by the railway station. In the old town the medieval church of **SAN GIOVANNI BATTISTA**, with its distinct black

stripes and marble rose window is worth seeing. The 16th-century *CAPUCHIN MONASTERY* on top of the hill above the old centre has some fine paintings.

The multicoloured cube-like houses of **Vernazza** are nestled around a small harbour overlooked by a 14th-century church. Many guidebook covers feature photographs of Vernazza's *MEDIEVAL WATCHTOWER* on the steep rocky promontory pointing out to sea. Vernazza is unquestionably the most picturesque of the five villages. But it's also the most touristic: from April to October *VIA ROMA* in the centre, with its bars and little shops, is crowded with foreign visitors walking from the railway station down to the scenic harbour. There, by the water, the bell tower of the 1318 parish church of *SANTA MARGHERITA* rises above the cosy piazza with its outdoor restaurants. The dark interior of the church still reflects the understated elegance of medieval times. Historically Vernazza was not only a village of wine-growers but an important seafaring city as well: it has the only natural sheltered harbour in the area. The inhabitants fought many wars in the 12th and 13th centuries as allies of the mighty republic of Genoa, which built fortifications around the village; today these are in ruins. As you can see from the colourfully painted entrances — some of them with reliefs — the people here were always quite wealthy, more so than in the neighbouring villages.

Corniglia is the only village of the Cinque Terre not on the coast: it lies on a ridge at a height of about 100m. From here you enjoy far-reaching views across the sea. It does not have a harbour, only a small rocky bay, reached by a long flight of steps — the 'Via alla Marina'. It gives the impression of being a mountain, rather than a seaside village. Corniglia is more remote and less crowded than its neighbours; it has no big hotels or posh restaurants. The heart of the old village is a cosy piazza shaded by plane trees and the umbrellas of two bars and a restaurant. The piazza is the sort of 'living room' of the little village, where everybody knows everybody else. In the daytime it's crowded with hikers having a break on their way from Vernazza to Manarola; in late evening it changes to a place of quiet contemplation. The church of *SAN PIETRO* at the exit from the village dates from the 14th century. The fine marble rose window is original, but the interior has been rebuilt in baroque style.

Walk 1: FROM MONTEROSSO TO RIOMAGGIORE — ALL THE CINQUE TERRE VILLAGES

See photographs on pages 9, 15, 28-29 and opposite

Distance/time: 12km/7.4mi; 4h45min

Grade: moderate, with an overall ascent/descent of about 550m/1800ft; two longer climbs each of 200m/650ft heading out from Monterosso and Vernazza. You have to be sure-footed between Monterosso and Vernazza; the path runs along narrow terraces.

Important note: The paths from Corniglia's railway station to Manarola and from Manarola to Riomaggiore (the Via dell' Amore) were damaged by major landslides; reopening date is uncertain, but unlikely before 2018. Up-to-date information is available at Park offices (see page 16). *In the meantime, take Walk 4 from Corniglia to Manarola. From there to Riomaggiore the Via Beccara is an alternative: see the panel opposite (below).*

Route-finding: easy; red and white waymarks of National Park Route 2 all along (but note that *all* the walking routes in the Park have the same red and white markings...)

Equipment: as pages 12-13

Refreshments: many bars and restaurants in the five villages;

simple bars en route at Prevo before Corniglia and at Corniglia railway station

Transport: 🚆 local train or (from April to October) 🚤 boat — more expensive but much nicer than a train ride through dark tunnels.

Map: Tourist & Footpaths Map Cinque Terre/Portovenere/Palmaria Island (1:25,000, Ligurpress), available at the National Park offices in railway stations, 5 €
Short walks: Monterosso – Vernazza (2h) and Vernazza – Corniglia railway station (1h45min).

Entrance fee: You need a permit to walk this route. Permits are available at railway stations, Park offices and various kiosks along the trail. They cost 7.50 € for one day, 14.50 € for two days. The full fee has to be paid even if you are just doing short sections. There is also a 'Carta Cinque Terre', costing 13 € per day or 23 € for two days (children from 4-12 years old pay less). This card is not only a walk permit, but also allows free travel on all local and regional trains between La Spezia and Levanto as well as all local buses in the five villages.

This is *the* classic walk in the Cinque Terre National Park, connecting all five villages. The route follows old coastal paths high above the sea, skirts the edge of steep slopes, crosses small terraces of olive groves and vineyards or runs through shady holm oak forests. The views down to the blue sea and the villages with their yellow- and red-coloured houses clinging to each other are often breathtaking. So it is with good reason that this walk from Monterosso to Riomaggiore has become the most popular walking route in all Italy. From April to October there will be many, many walkers on the paths. So start very early to avoid the big crowds.



Ligurian Sea

Start the walk by turning left when you leave **Monterosso's** RAILWAY STATION. Follow the pavement above the beach to a nearby road tunnel. Here take the pedestrian lane to the right: it skirts the steep slope guarded by an old WATCHTOWER, to come down onto the beach near the town centre. Keep to the right of the railway bridge and pass another beach, to arrive at the entrance gate of the HOTEL LA ROCA. Take the paved path with railings to the right here (RED AND WHITE WAYMARKS, ROUTE 2). Circling to the left you soon arrive at the KIOSK where you can buy your pass (15min).

Now you come into the typical Cinque Terre landscape, with its terraced vineyards and olive groves. The gradient soon becomes quite severe, as you climb a flight of natural stone steps through lush green vegetation. At the end of this ascent the path levels out and offers far-reaching views down to the sea. For a short way the path becomes very narrow as it runs alongside drystone walls (*take care here!*). You pass behind a lone house, circle to the right, and cross a small old STONE BRIDGE. Then the path

widens out a little. Next you pass a small resting area (1h) which offers a superb view towards the steep cliffs of Vernazza. The path then runs along rocky slopes where subtropical agaves flourish, as it gradually loses height. You have views towards picturesque Vernazza. After descending 'staircases' and small lanes you come out on lively VIA ROMA in the old town centre of Vernazza.

The ongoing route to Corniglia starts opposite, at house number 50. The railway station is nearby at the upper end of Via Roma; while the lower end opens out to the IDYLIC HARBOUR BAY with its outdoor restaurants and the medieval church of SANTA MARGHERITA (2h).

Leave Vernazza on the small stepped lane VIA M CARATTINO. Climbing out of the village, it skirts a MEDIEVAL TOWER, passes two bars with panoramic terraces and emerges on an open slope with succulents and agaves. Here you enjoy the famous view of Vernazza on its rocky promontory above the sea. Three minutes later, the path (now stone-laid), starts to climb more seriously through



olive groves. You pass through the hamlet of **Prevo** with a simple bar on your right (**2h45min**). About two minutes higher up, the path starts its descent towards Corniglia which you can see ahead, stretched out on a ridge above the sea. Here you're walking a well maintained old cobbled mule trail lined by drystone walls. Beyond a bridge over a stream, the path crosses a small road on the outskirts of Corniglia. Keep ahead on a paved path through vineyards to the church of SAN PIETRO at the upper end of **Corniglia (3h25min)**.

A short detour to the right leads to the cosy central piazza, but for Manarola you have to keep ahead on the lane to the left of San Pietro, soon crossing the station road emerging from the village. Go down the 383 steps of **VIA LARDARINA**, descending through lush vegetation to the sea. Turning left at the end of the steps you reach Corniglia's small **RAILWAY STATION (3h45min)**.

Behind the building, take the subway below the railway and follow a track parallel to the seashore and a pebble beach. After a short steep climb you

rejoin the old coastal path, walking above foaming surf and below steep cliffs overgrown with agaves and wild fennel. Skirting the promontory, suddenly **Manarola** appears, a beautiful image of colourful houses piled one atop the other like sugar cubes. Go down to the little harbour at the foot of the village, then take the main alley into the centre of the village. Cross the railway line and turn right. A short tunnel takes you to the **RAILWAY STATION (4h20min)**.

To the left of the building steps lead up to the beginning of the famous **VIA DELL'AMORE** — easy walking on a flat, paved footpath protected by hand-rails. It runs along steep cliffs and offers fine sea views, but you meet masses of day-trippers here. In just under 20 minutes the Via dell'Amore ends at **Riomaggiore's RAILWAY STATION**. A short tunnel takes you to the centre of the village. Leaving the tunnel, turn right to cross under the rail lines and come to the beautiful small **HARBOUR (4h45min)**. Passenger boats dock at the left (southern) end of the bay.



SUNFLOWER LANDSCAPES 'The hallowed blue books'

— SUNDAY TIMES

Cinque Terre and the Riviera di Levante Second edition

area covered by this book



walking map



area map



The **Riviera di Levante** between Genoa and La Spezia has become a much-loved hiking area — perhaps the most popular in all Italy apart from the Alps. And the '**Cinque Terre**', the steep coast south of Levanto cradling the five villages of Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore, is the best loved of all. If you enjoyed Sunflower's best-selling guide to Sorrento and the Amalfi Coast, you're sure to love these landscapes with their steeply terraced vineyards, ancient mule trails and colourful villages. This is a **walking guide**; the Cinque Terre is not suitable for car touring. But you can dip into the walks and use the hiking maps to find some splendid picnic spots.

- 50 long and short walks, for all ages and abilities
- topographical walking maps
- free downloadable GPS tracks
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