



Independent walking tour (CIN5)

Pisa, Lucca, Cinque Terre & Portovenere

walking & sightseeing between Tuscany & Liguria



TRIP NOTES

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****GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit Of Italy****



INTRODUCTION

This tour starts from the famous city of Pisa, known worldwide for its Leaning Tower (the bell tower of the city's cathedral). But the city is also home to the University of Pisa, which has a history going back to the 12th century and boasts more than 20 other historic churches, several beautiful historic palaces and various bridges across the River Arno.

About 20km further north lies the city of Lucca, considered one of the most charming in Tuscany. Its centre is completely surrounded by Renaissance-era town walls, and at its heart is an amazing square in the form of an old Roman amphitheatre. Strolling through its pedestrian streets is a real pleasure.

Then you travel into the region of Liguria, a beautiful coastal region in Northern Italy. It is protected from the northern winds by a continuous protective backbone of high mountains, from the peaks of the Maritime Alps to the Apennines. That's why Liguria is famed for its exceptionally mild weather all year round and why it is the perfect place, despite the uneven terrain, for the flourishing of lush flora including the typical shrubs of the Mediterranean maquis, and also the tall trees that are a typical feature of Alpine flora. It's capital city Genova 'La Superba' has ruled the Mediterranean for centuries, but for hikers the area is most known because of the stunning Cinque Terre.

The area of the 'Cinque Terre' gets its name from the five picturesque villages of Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore. The area, now a major National Park, is a unique part of Italy. For over a thousand years people have lived in this dramatic landscape, slowly altering its features and cultivating the steep hillsides that lead down to rocky shores. An extensive network of ancient mule tracks – today used as footpaths – takes you through an extraordinary landscape of terraces, built by hand with stones and earth. But the region of Liguria has more to offer: the small towns of Portovenere, with a wonderful island just in front of it at the entrance to the 'Gulf of Poets', and the lively Levanto, a charming medieval town with a broad beach, both nearby.

You also have the time to visit the historic towns of Levanto, Portovenere and of course the five charming villages which make up the 'Cinque Terre', little gems of colourful houses in a green landscape. Another highlight is the small island of Palmaria, just off the coast from Portovenere, at the entrance of the 'Gulf of Poets'. Walking here is an unforgettable experience!



Please note: this is a moderately easy tour, suitable for those who have some experience with walking and a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are on good paths, mostly well waymarked. Elsewhere it is necessary to follow the route notes provided together with the maps. Average walking times: approx. from 5 to 6 h. each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Pisa

Arrival in Pisa. After settling in at your hotel there is perhaps some time for a quick visit to the town centre and maybe a swim to wash off the weariness of the journey. In the evening you are free to go out for dinner in a nice restaurant nearby.

Accommodation: Pisa - Hotel ***

Total walking time: around 1 h. + sightseeing time

Day 2 – Pisa & Lucca

You start a beautiful round walk through the old town centre of Pisa straight from your hotel. The walk ultimately brings you to the train station, where you make a short ride to the nearby town of Lucca, one of Tuscany's most charming towns with much to see, ranging from the Roman amphitheatre (now the town square), to amazing Renaissance architecture. First you walk through Piazza Risorgimento and then make your way into the heart of this stunning walled town. Few cars are allowed in the old town centre so it's a pleasure to explore the maze of old streets and alleyways without needing to dodge the traffic! Take your time to wander towards the centre and perhaps to climb to the top of Torre Guinigi, a tall tower attached to a medieval villa, for a splendid view of the ancient tiled rooftops. Towards the end of the afternoon you travel back by train to Pisa. This is the perfect time to visit the Piazza dei Miracoli, with its famous leaning tower, as most of the crowds have gone. A stroll through the old centre, with maybe a stop for a drink, brings you back to your hotel.

Accommodation: Pisa - Hotel ***

Total walking time: around 1 h. + sightseeing time

Day 3 – From Levanto along the Cape of Punta Mesco

The first day walk takes you along the coast to Monterosso al Mare. The first part of the walk leads up towards Punta Mesco, the most notable promontory in the region. This is a good spot to stop at for a picnic lunch. Just short of the headland you can make a small detour to the ruins of an old 11th-century hermitage and the nearby 'semaforo', where you will enjoy marvellous views of the rugged coastline. Then you follow a fairly steep path down into Monterosso, a colourful village with blue, red & yellow houses that cluster behind the beachfront. There is then time to explore the town before taking the local train back to Levanto. For those who feel like it there is also the option of walking back from here, following a more inland forested path, which brings you back over the ridge behind the castle of Levanto.

Accommodation: Levanto - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 5 km. Approx. walking time: 3 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 350 m.

Day 4 – The “Walk of Love”

First you take the train to Riomaggiore, the southernmost of the five villages. From there you start the most 'classic' of all walks in the Cinque Terre: the walk along the famous 'Sentiero dell'Amore' ('Lover's Walk') to Manarola, an attractive little village with steep multicoloured houses overlooking a rocky port. Then head up the 365 steps to Corniglia, perched on a ridge overlooking the sea. From there you continue through terraced vineyards and the occasional citrus grove. As you approach Vernazza, dominated by its old fortress, you enjoy some of the best views in the region. You contour around the hillsides following a narrow track that leads you up and down, before a fairly steep descent brings you into the village itself. In Vernazza, arguably the prettiest of all the villages, there is time to



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climb the castle tower for a stunning view of the port with its brightly painted boats. There are numerous cafés & bars where you can enjoy refreshments before taking the train back home.

Accommodation: Levanto - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 15 km. Approx. walking time: 6 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 450 m. (longer options available)

Day 5 – To the Coast West of Levanto

Today you walk in a western direction from Levanto. The first part of the walk goes along the beach, then the path goes up into the nearby hills and down to the little seaside village of Bonassola. It then goes through the seaside hills towards the small 'village' of Framura, an aggregation of scattered hamlets on the hillside. From Costa, the highest hamlet, an almost level path contours the hillside, with nice views over the sea. A steep descent brings you down to the next resort, Deiva Marina (with the option of continuing to Moneglia or even Sestri Levante). This walk along the coast brings you through several charming little villages, where you have the time to grab a coffee or just relax. You'll also have the chance to get some lunch there. You can take the train back to Levanto from any of the villages on the way, in case you want to shorten the walk.

Accommodation: Levanto - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 16 km. Approx. walking time: 6 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 700 m.

Optional Extra Day: The Sanctuaries of the Madonna Saviore & Reggio

Today's walk takes you into the inland of the Cinque Terre, to the churches of Madonna di Reggio and Madonna di Saviore. You first take the train to Vernazza and then walk along the coast to Monterosso, approaching this beautiful little town from the other side. After a coffee break you start climbing up to the sanctuary of Madonna di Saviore. Here you can have something to eat or relax for a while, before walking on to the next sanctuary, that of Madonna di Reggio. Then the walk continues more or less along the contour lines; you walk through the hills to the little church of San Bernardo, with beautiful views over the coast, and from there you descend down to the coast at Vernazza again. A shorter option takes you directly from Madonna di Reggio, past a number of little chapels, back down to Vernazza.

Accommodation: Levanto - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 9 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 550 m.

Day 6 – From Riomaggiore to Portovenere

Today you walk in an eastern direction. From Riomaggiore, you begin your walk to Campiglia and Portovenere. You first hike up a long flight of steps to the Santuario della Madonna di Montenero (optional bus). Continuing uphill you begin walking along the coastal cliffs, through terraced vineyards, enjoying wonderful views of the coastline framed by clear blue waters. You are now on the 'Sentiero Rosso', the ridge-top traverse that goes from one end of the Cinque Terre to the other. You pass through the little hamlet of Campiglia where you can stop for some refreshments. Walking down into the pine forest, the track narrows as you continue towards Portovenere with further spectacular views. Arriving at the 16th-century castle above the village, you may be able to see the distant peaks of the Alpi Apuane before a long flight of steps takes you into the heart of the village. There is time to visit the charming village and Punta San Pietro, before settling in at your hotel overlooking the Gulf of the Poets.

Accommodation: Portovenere - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 13 km. Approx. walking time: 5,5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 650 m.

Day 7 – Round walk over the Island of Palmaria

After the longer walk yesterday, today you'll have some time to recover. There is the possibility of making an easy round walk over the island of Palmaria, just across the bay from Portovenere. By boat you make the short crossing



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and then you'll have the whole day to discover the beauty of this very Mediterranean island, immersed in the dense vegetation, overlooking the cliffs with just the seagulls and azure sky above you. Take some time to discover the impressive fortresses too and perhaps go for a swim on one of the remote beaches. Upon returning by boat to the mainland you still have time to visit the charming village of Portovenere itself and choose the restaurant for your final supper in the harbour of Venus.

Accommodation: Portovenere - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 5-6 km. Approx. walking time: 3 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 300 m.

Day 8 – Departure

End of the tour.



TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

Accommodation is on a bed and breakfast basis in 3-star quality hotels. All rooms have en-suite facilities. No dinners are included so you will be free to choose from the wide choice of restaurants in the area for your evening meals. No picnic lunches are included in the tour price; these can be prepared for you or materials for picnics can easily be purchased in the villages.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMODATION

It is possible to do this tourstaying in more luxurious 3/4-star hotels (only in Levanto and Monterosso).

INCLUDED

- 2 nights in Pisa *** - BB
- 3 nights in Levanto *** - BB
- 2 nights in Portovenere *** - BB
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1:25.000 scale
- 24/7 assistance & luggage transfer



NOT INCLUDED

- Departure & city taxes
- Visas & travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of personal nature

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Easy: Mostly easy walks, though some include walking uphill, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces. On some days extensions or shortcuts are possible.

Fitness: High standard of fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 5 hours a day in the hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.

FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Footpaths: Most paths are relatively well maintained, but during the season some paths can get overgrown (*we are in continuous contact with local authorities to keep the paths clean – please help us by providing your feedback on the quality of the paths*).

Waymarking: Only a small part of the route is waymarked (partly by us); elsewhere you have to follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps. With these you will always be able to find your route. In case you don't feel confident a local guide can be provided for some trails.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in PISA. Pisa Airport offers many low-cost flights to/from destinations all over Europe. There are also frequent trains from all directions.

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast in PORTOVENERE on day 8. The return to Pisa (airport) is most easily made by train.

N.B. Please note that there is no (cheap) parking space anywhere on the Cinque Terre except for Levanto!

TOUR VARIATIONS

It is possible to include some extra nights in your tour in any of the accommodations 'en route'.

Extra walking or sightseeing options will be provided !!!

The very frequent trains, which connect all the villages, make it easy to modify the programme. It gives you all the freedom to do the walks at your own pace, or alternatively, do some sightseeing.



This makes it possible to opt for just **one accommodation** on the Cinque Terre. This accommodation can either be at Levanto, Monterosso or Riomaggiore, depending on availability and/or special requests.

At the beginning or the end of the tour there is also an opportunity to visit Genoa and/or Pisa / Florence, or spend some time on the beach, somewhere in Liguria. The tour can easily be extended with a few extra days in Pisa or Florence. Several good accommodations are available. Details & prices on request.

Longer and shorter versions of this tour are also available. Prices on request.

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