



THE CINQUE TERRE

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THE CINQUE TERRE



Overview of the Cinque Terre

(pronounced CHINK-WAY-TEAR-EH)

The rugged coastline of Liguria is peppered with small fishing villages, terraced vineyards, olive groves, and breathtaking vistas. Although the area has become quite a tourist destination in recent years, you'll find the local folks still attached to their age-old customs and traditions. When in the Cinque Terre it is hard not to throw your sightseeing itinerary to the wind, kick back your heels, and enjoy a real vacation in Italy's Cinque Terre region.

The Cinque Terre—or “five lands” in English—is a loose-knit group of villages on Italy's northern Ligurian Sea. For centuries the people here have etched out a living from the land and the sea.

Castles built in the Middle Ages were erected

to protect the local land baron and his serfs. It was not uncommon during this era for raiders and pirates to kidnap locals and sell them into slavery or hold them for ransom. Later, during the Renaissance and beyond, the villagers became more independent and began to forge out a living centered around fishing, vines, and olives.

These steep and rocky mountains were certainly not ideal for planting and harvesting crops, but the locals were stuck here and isolated from the rest of the world, so they made do with what they had. They constructed hundreds of miles of terraced gardening spots, all held in place by free-standing stone walls.

The five villages are connected by a series of trails which wander through the vineyards, gardens, lemon and olive groves. Originally these trails were constructed to give access to the terraced gardens and to provide a transportation route between villages.

Today, this entire area has been designated a national park by the Italian government in order to preserve the delicate balance between tourism and conservation. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. To help finance some of the national park's conservation efforts, a permit is required to use the area's trails.

Upon arrival in a Cinque Terre village, I suggest you get to know it! After settling into your accommodation, get out and explore your

“home” village. Drop into a café or enoteca for a glass of wine. Visit the local grocer and stock up on your picnic supplies. Relax and enjoy the afternoon. Then about two hours before dark, find a bar and order an aperitivo (before dinner drink) such as an Aperol or Campari Spritz or a glass of the local white wine. After dinner, cap off the day with a digestif or glass of wine while enjoying the moonlight glimmering off the rippling Mediterranean waters.

Coastal Villages of Liguria Overview

The five villages known as the Cinque Terre have been spilling into the sea for centuries. It wasn't until the unification of Italy in 1870 that the railroad brought commerce and people to these remote villages. By the 1960's, the automobile road winding down from the mountains was completed and connecting all the villages. In the 1970's travel writers began raving about these five villages and tourism really took off. The five villages were designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997. Then in 1999, the Italian government proclaimed the villages and the surrounding mountains as the Cinque Terre National Park.

From north to south the Liguria Sea stretches for about six miles touching all the villages. Monterosso is the northern-most village, followed by Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola, and finally Riomaggiore to the south. There are a few other villages that lie just outside the Cinque Terre boundaries that sport the same

look, feel, and relaxing attitude. These are Levanto, Sestri Levante, Santa Margherita Ligure, and Portofino to the north and Porto Venere to the south. To the south, just beyond Porto Venere is La Spezia, the road, rail, and sea transportation hub to the area.

Itinerary Suggestions and When to Visit

The Cinque Terre deserves at least 1.5 days and 2 nights. With this plan, you can ride the train in by midday. Check into your hotel, B&B, room, or apartment for 2 nights. Then, explore your home village in the afternoon and evening. The next day, purchase a Cinque Terre Train and Trail Pass and hike, take a boat, or ride the rails from one village to the next. In the summer, be sure to reserve some time for swimming and relaxing on one of the rocky beaches. With three or more days I'd add in more beach time, taking a boat to Porto Venere, slowing down to experience a village, not just blowing through it.

Nowadays, the Cinque Terre is loaded with tourists from mid-April until the end of October. In the winter (November through March), the place is dead. Many restaurants and hotels close for the season and the locals leave to take their vacations elsewhere in the world. April to mid-June and September through mid-October are pretty busy. July and August are a bit less crowded and you'll find many Europeans vacationing in the area.

The Cinque Terre Villages at a Glance

Monterosso is the northernmost village and the only real resort town. There are lots of wine shops, artisan shops, hotels, and restaurants. The new town, built in the mid-1800's, features a long seaside promenade with pebble and sand beaches, rental umbrellas and chairs, and seaside bars and restaurants. A tunnel, through San Cristoforo hill, leads to the old medieval-era town with narrow lanes, laundry flapping in the breeze, a popular town "square", and lots of restaurants, bars, and gathering places. Of course, the local church dominates the main square and its bell tolls with each passing hour.

Vernazza is perhaps the most photogenic village and consequently the most crowded. Day-trippers can ruin this town, so visit early (before 10:00 a.m.) or later (after 5:00 p.m.) to avoid disappointment. Its "main street" winds down to the harbor from the train station and is flanked by a bar, a pizzeria, wine shops, gelato vendors, and tourist shops selling beach gear, tee-shirts, and trinkets. The harbor is flanked by the local church and bell tower, the pier, and an ancient castle on the hilltop.

Corniglia is perched 100 meters above the seaside and is the smallest and quietest village. From the train station, there are nearly 400 steps to reach the town. Don't worry; you can also take the bus, which is usually waiting outside the station with the arrival of each train. You'll not find too many tourists up here in this cool and shady village. There are some very good restaurants, bars, and wine shops scat-

tered around the main church square.

Manarola is delightful but try to visit early or late in the day. Don't be fooled by the train station! You'll have to walk through the tunnel to reach the old town square. To the left is the harbor with cliff diving and swimming, restaurants, artisan shops, and a scenic trail circling through the town's vineyards. To the right, the street leads steadily uphill to the top of town where the church square opens up to wonderful views of the sea and mountains.

Riomaggiore is the southernmost village. Trains arrive at the station in the small square, which contains a shop, a bar, the park service office and a fountain. Head to the right, through the tunnel, to arrive in the old town. At the end of the tunnel, the main "street" continues uphill to the left (turning right and going down the stairs leads to the harbor and beach).

Walking to the left, up the ancient cobbled street, will bring you past shops selling food, wine and beach stuff. The street is lined with bars serving local wine and good food. There are several pizzerias as well. This entire town sits in a valley surrounded by terraced gardens, vineyards, and groves seeming to fall off the hillside.

Practical Information

Getting to and from the Cinque Terre Region

Arrival is easiest by train and with a little more effort, it can be reached by automobile.

By Plane

The nearest airport is Pisa (PSA). There are a few seasonal flights from the USA that arrive here and many flights from Europe. The convenient PISAMOVER trams (pisa-mover.com) link the airport and the Pisa Centrale train station with connection to the Cinque Terre (1 hour to La Spezia Centrale).

By Train

Passenger trains run about every 30-45 minutes through the Cinque Terre villages. Some trains stop at all five villages, other stop only at Monterosso and Riomaggiore. The main jumping off points for the Cinque Terre villages are La Spezia, to the south, and Genoa to the north. The train tracks are mostly under the mountains in tunnels dug more than a century ago and are on the main railroad line between Rome and Genoa. High-speed passenger trains and freight trains also use these rails, but they do not stop in any of the villages, they just barrel through at 80 mph. As a tourist, you will most likely have to make a transfer at some larger train station before arriving in a Cinque Terre village. From the south, that will most likely be La Spezia Centrale or Pisa Centrale. For the north, it's Genoa Piazza Principe, Levante, or possibly Sestri Levante.

By Car

I'd skip driving if at all possible. The narrow and winding roads leading down from the Autostrada to the villages are hectic for drivers and will eat up at least an hour of your time

once you leave the main highway. If you must drive in, consider parking at Monterosso, there are two parking lots, one on the hill above town and one on the harbor. Also, some hotels located in Monterosso's new town have parking available for their guests. Do not park on the streets and never leave anything of value in your vehicle.

If you are heading to Monterosso, leave the Autostrada A-12 at the Carrodano-Levanto exit. You'll have to pay a highway toll here, often at an unattended machine that "speaks" to you in Italian. Take your time, have some coins and cash handy, pay your toll, and drive the narrow road (1 hour) through the mountains to the sea. If you are arriving in Riomaggiore, Corniglia or Manarola, leave the Autostrada at La Spezia and follow the signs to the road that travels along the coast. Don't even try to drive into Vernazza, there is limited parking and the road is in terrible condition.

By Cruise Ship

Cruise ships arrive at the docks in La Spezia several times a week in spring, summer and fall. You can find their schedules and docking timetables at crew-center.com.

Getting around the Cinque Terre

You have several options for getting around in the Cinque Terre: train, boat, national park shuttle bus, taxi, and on foot. One is not better than the other and I often use all choices when I visit the Cinque Terre. The villages are con-

connected by trail, train, and boat. I'll discuss connecting the villages and follow that by addressing transportation options in the villages.

Train Travel

The railroad here is built to go through the mountains instead of over and around them. The short rides between villages consist of dark tunnels followed by quick, breathtaking views of the Ligurian Sea and surrounding countryside. Trains run from La Spezia (just south of the “official” Cinque Terre villages), through Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza, and Monterosso, and end in Levanto.

Single Train Tickets

Train tickets can be purchased at the Italian rail ticket office at each village. Point-to-point tickets are €4 per ride regardless of how far you ride the train within the Cinque Terre boundary. This is pretty expensive, especially considering there are cheaper alternatives. The tickets can be purchased from an English-speaking attendant at the train station ticket window in each village or from electronic ticket machines at the train stations. Keep in mind there could be long lines at the ticket window and often the electronic ticket machines are out of order or have long lines of people queued to purchase their ticket. If you are handy with computers, visit [trenitalia.com](https://www.trenitalia.com) to purchase tickets online or download the Trenitalia app for your mobile device. Be sure to validate your ticket if purchased from an attendant or kiosk. If purchased online, print the ticket or snap a photo to show the conductor.

If using the handy app, just show it to the conductor on the train, if asked to present your ticket.

Combination Train and Hiking/Trekking Card

The Cinque Terre Treno Multi-Service (MS) Card is available for both train and trail use. The Cinque Terre Treno Multi-Service Card is the best option because it allows you to hop on or hop off the train anywhere at any time within the validation period. Additionally, it is convenient in that it frees you up from standing in line to purchase train tickets and allows for catching a train at the last minute without worrying about buying a ticket. Typically, if you use the train four times during a day, the Cinque Terre Treno MS Card pays for itself. But really, I suggest purchasing the Cinque Terre Treno MS Card strictly for the convenience of hop-on-hop-off train travel.

The Cinque Terre Treno MS Card can be purchased online, in person at each village's National Park Office, or from the Trenitalia ticket office. Cards purchased online or at the National Park Office must be purchased for the date of use. They are validated on the spot. Purchasing the Card from the Trenitalia ticket window will get you an unvalidated Card to use whenever you wish. This is especially convenient if you'd like to purchase your Card on the day you arrive, but not use it until the next day. Regardless of where you purchase your Card, it must be validated in the green-and-white ticket machines at a train station. Train conductors make it their quest to find tourists with un-

stamped tickets and then levy a hefty €50 fine on the spot.

The Cinque Terre Treno MS Card Costs One-Day Card

€16 adults (13-69)

€13 seniors (70+)

€10 juniors (4-12)

€42 Family (2 adults and 2 juniors)

Two-Day Card €29 all ages

Three-Day Card €41 all ages

A validated Cinque Terre Treno MS Card has several nice additional benefits. You will have access to WIFI Hotspots at train stations and other designated locations within the park; free use of the toilet facilities in Monterosso, Vernazza, and train stations (although the toilets are nothing to write home about); and ATC Mini Bus service (locally known as “pulmino”) connecting the train station with the towns (see each town for a detailed description).

Train Travel Hints

The “station” and platform for a village may be located inside a tunnel. Don’t be fooled if there is no indication that there is actually a village beyond the dark tunnel. Be aware of the stops your train will make and keep a mental tally.

Don’t get too concerned about missing your stop. Trains run frequently and all stop at the two outermost villages of Levanto and La Spe-

zia. The worst thing that can happen is you'll miss your stop and get to explore another village. You can always hop on the next train traveling in the opposite direction and reach your destination.

Any train stopping in Vernazza, Corniglia, or Manarola (the inner villages) will make stops at all five villages.

Trains are rarely on time. Keep this in mind when planning connections.

Keep your map and train schedule handy and learn how to read them.

Train tracks on the “sea side” travel north (from La Spezia) toward Monterosso and Levanto.

Train tracks on the “land side” travel south (from Levanto) toward Riomaggiore and La Spezia.

There are monitors at most train stations that display the departure times of all trains stopping at the given station. Trains going north are marked “per” Levanto, Genoa, Sestri Levante. Trains heading south are noted “per” La Spezia. All trains have a number and that may help if you have a printed ticket. You may also see “in ritardo” followed by a number meaning it is late by the noted number of minutes. Hope you do not see “SOPP” which means the train has been cancelled.

Validate your Cinque Terre Treno MS Card or train ticket the first time you use it by punching it in one of the green-and-white machines at the train stations. This is very important!

Sign your Cinque Terre Treno MS Card and add your ID or passport information if required.

Train doors may not open automatically. If the door does not open look around and push the green button, pull the silver knob on the handle, or lift the red bar.

Boat Travel

Beginning around Easter, a tourist boat calls at Monterosso, Vernazza, Manarola, Riomaggiore, Porto Venere and its nearby islands. Traveling on the sea with views of the shoreline, terraced vineyards, and mountains is well worth a voyage. I suggest it if the weather and seas are in good shape. Boat schedules and prices are posted at train stations, boat docks, hotels, and online at <http://www.navigazionegolfo-deipoti.it/en/>. In general, the boats sail the Cinque Terre regions from about 10:30 to 18:00. However, always verify the schedule at one of the locations mentioned above. Current rates from Monterosso for the most popular voyages are listed below.

All-Day Ticket

(w/Porto Venere) €35 Adults
€20 Kids (6-11)

All-Day Ticket

(5 Terre only) €27 Adults
€15 Kids

Rent a Private Boat and Skipper

If you look around each village's harbor, you'll likely find an advertisement for a private boat and even private tours. Or just look around the harbor and try to pick out a boat looking for business. A voyage from one village to another on a private little boat will cost €30-€50. Split that among several people and it is affordable.

ATC Minibus Shuttle (Pulmino)

These minibuses shuttle tourist and locals within each village, usually beginning at or near the train station. From there they make stops at key locations in town and the hills beyond. They do not travel from one village to the other. They are free with a valid Cinque Terre Treno MS Card, or you can purchase a €2.50 ticket from the driver (€1.50 if pre-purchased at the Park office).

These buses are often completely full of people and operate on an ever-changing schedule, so I wouldn't count on a ride if you're trying to stick to a schedule. The buses and drivers take a break during the afternoon "pausa" from 12:30-16:00 or so. The most useful ATC buses are in Corniglia, getting you from the sea-side train station to the hilltop town (the bus is usually waiting on the road next to the train station at train arrivals) and the bus in Riomaggiore beginning at the foot of via Colombo traveling

uphill to the Castello.

For a scenic look at the non-touristy side of the Cinque Terre, consider riding one of these minibuses up beyond town into the hills and santuario churches. ATC Bus schedules are published here www.atcesercizio.it/images/orari/est/Cinque_Terre.pdf.

Hiking in The Cinque Terre

Locals have been walking between the Cinque Terre villages for centuries. Originally these foot paths (sentiero) were used to access the terraced gardens, groves, and vineyards which provided plenty of food and drink for the medieval villages. Years ago, I recall struggling up the trail between Monterosso and Vernazza and having two old ladies in black dresses and high heels breeze past me on the way home from Sunday mass. Nowadays, the national park has taken over some of the maintenance of these trails and have marked them with blue blazes, red and white blazes, white arrows, and some signage in the villages.

If you only have a couple of days, I suggest sticking to the major coastal trails linking the villages and marked with a blue blaze. These trails are known as Sentiero Azzurro (Blue). With more time, one could venture to the higher trails up in the mountains affording great views of the seas and towns below and practically no crowds! Before beginning your trek, pick up a map at the National Park office (about €5), download the handy app AllTrails

alltrails.com/ or get the official Cinque Terre National Park app “Pn5t plus”. Both available from [Apple Store](#) or [Google Play](#).

The National Park is getting better at providing online information about trail conditions, closures, trail descriptions and maps, and elevation profiles. This information can be found at mappe.parconazionale5terre.it/plus/index2.html. For general information about the National Park and its programs visit parconazionale5terre.it.

Cinque Terre Trekking Card

This card is necessary for those hiking on the coastal trails (Sentiero Azzurro) between Monterosso and Riomaggiore. All other trails are free of charge and do not require a Trekking Card. A validated Trekking Card entitles the user to all the features mentioned in the Cinque Terre MS Card section except for train travel.

One-Day Card

€7.50 adults (13-69)

€6 seniors (70+)

€4.50 juniors (4-12)

€19.60 family (2 adults and 2 juniors)

Two-Day Card

€14.50 adults (13-69)

€10 seniors (70+)

€7.20 juniors (4-12)

€31.50 family (2 adults and 2 juniors)

Hiking, Trekking and Trail Tips

Before heading out on one of the coastal trails you need to decide if you can handle the strenuous activity required to complete the hike. Several of the trails are not easy hikes! Remember, the trails begin in a village at sea level and climb many hundreds of feet up into the mountains. You'll need to be in relatively good physical shape, have a supply of water, sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses. Recently, rules forbidding flip-flops and Vibram sole shoes have been enforced along the most popular coastal trails.

The trails linking Monterosso to Vernazza to Corniglia are the most strenuous portion of the coastal trail. Most likely, these will be the only portion of the coastal trail that will be open, and consequently, the most crowded too. Expect to encounter steep climbs, narrow footpaths, rocky and unstable footing, and lots of stairs/steps.

Expect to find lots of people hiking the coastal trails at almost any time of the day. There have been a few times when I've started out hiking in Monterosso and the trail was so crowded that I turned back and gave up for the day. On a recent tour, an adventurous couple were on the trail before 6:00 a.m., arrived in Vernazza by 7:30, and ended up in Corniglia by 9:30! They did not see anyone on the trail until after 8:00

a.m. A good plan is to begin early (before 8:00) or begin late (after 17:00). If starting late in the day, be sure to give yourself plenty of time to complete your route before sunset.

The SVA Coastal Trail Blue Trail #592

This trail is known by all the names mentioned above and if the entire trail were open, it would stretch seven miles from Monterosso to Riomaggiore. Ironically, the trail is not marked in blue on any map, nor is it blazed blue. So why it is named the Sentiero Azzurro, the Blue Trail? I don't know. Let me know if you find out the answer! This trail is marked with RED AND WHITE PAINTED BLAZES.

Currently, only about half the trail is open for hiking, the section from Monterosso to Vernazza to Corniglia. The route from Corniglia to Manarola to Riomaggiore is closed and not due to open until 2021. Here, I'll describe the sections likely to be open and to also provide some alternative trails to fill in the gaps. Finally, I'll describe the trails from south to north, the way in which most trail guides and official publications describe them. However, the trails can be done in either direction.

SVA2 or 592-3 Corniglia to Vernazza

Elevation gain: 501 feet, 269 meters

Distance: 2.1 miles, 3.37 Km

Time: 1:30 to 2:00 hours

This trail is wild and scenic, stretching through forests of shrubs, cacti, olive trees, and lush hardwoods. Along the trail you'll find

wonderful vista points looking out toward the sea and the surrounding terraced mountains. The trail is rocky and often narrow and can be very dry and dusty in periods of drought. However, with rain, it turns all that dust to mud and the rocks become very slippery. This trail differs from others along the SVA route in that it winds through mostly undeveloped terrain.

The trail begins at Corniglia's railroad station following first the road along the railroad tracks and then zigzagging up a set of 365 stairs (the Lardarina Stairs) leading to the town of Cornelia. You can avoid the stairs by hopping on the ATC Shuttle Bus from the station to the village. At the top of the stairs, continue on the road until you reach Villa Cecio where the trail leaves the road and continues straight. The trail continues through the forest and across a small stone bridge spanning Rio della Groppa, then ascends through some olive groves with great vistas and on to the hamlet of Prevo. From here you are near the apex of your hike. Then the trail descends down some stairs and affords great views of the Castello of Vernazza. Approaching Vernazza, you'll find Bar la Torre and some inviting and shady tables along the trail.

SVA2 or 592-4 Vernazza to Monterosso

Elevation gain: 688 feet, 209 meters

Distance: 2.3 miles, 3.6 Km

Time: 2:00 to 2:30 hours

I think this is the most scenic of all the coastal trails. However, it probably is the most strenuous as well. (Consider beginning in Monteros-

so so you'll get the strenuous climbing out of the way while you are fresh). The route begins in Vernazza at the alley leading to the Church of Saint Margaret of Antioch. From there it is a steep climb winding above the harbor of Vernazza (good views) through olive groves and vineyards. You'll pass a few "waterfalls" followed by more terraced vineyards, and finally, through lemon groves. The last section is a difficult descent on steep and almost unending stairs until you get near the sea, where the path levels out and pops into the old town near the square and beach.

With more time, you'll find additional trekking paths located farther up the hills than the SVA coastal path. These are quiet, secluded, and free. Refer to the online resources for complete descriptions.

Refer to the information in each village's section for a few other shorter walks and scenic destinations.

Beaches and Swimming General Information

Every town except Corniglia has a rocky beach with access to the cool water of the Ligurian Sea. Monterosso is the only town with a sandy/small pebbled beach, rental umbrellas, and chairs. If you're going to the beach, leave your passport at the hotel. Beach attire is appropriate everywhere. Wear a shirt or cover up when going to and from the beach or when dining. There is not much danger of theft or pickpockets in the Cinque Terre, but watch your

things when swimming and sitting at outdoor cafés.

Monterosso al Mare (Population 1168)

This northern-most village is the only true beach resort in the area. Hotels are plentiful in the new town (known as Fegina) and the beaches here are a mixture of sand and small pebbles. You'll find plenty of lounge chairs and umbrellas to rent (about €22 per day during the summer), shops selling beach supplies and tourist trinkets, and cafes lining the seaside promenade. The train station, National Park and Tourist office, and public parking lot are also located in the new town.

Through the pedestrian tunnel, to the south, you'll come upon the old medieval town (Centro Storico) which will have you feeling like you've stepped back in time 600 years. Its narrow, cobbled, and crooked lanes follow the old riverbed (still flowing beneath via Roma) up to the top of town. There are many restaurants, artisan shops, a few hotels, and of course, the ever-present town square, local church and bell tower.

[Getting to and from Monterosso](#)

The TRAIN station is in the new town (Fegina) just steps from the beach. There are three tracks at the train station, but only tracks 1 and 3 are used for passenger trains. If arriving from the south, you'll hop off at platform (binario) 1 (from the north it's platform 3) and walk through the tunnel running under the tracks to reach the station. You will have to walk down

a flight of stairs to exit the station. From there, you are in the new town. Walking to the left, you'll reach the tunnel and old town in about 10 minutes. Walk to the right to reach the parking lot and the quieter side of the new town.

The ATC SHUTTLE BUS travels along the only road/walkway here (via Fegina) that parallels the sea. Since you'll probably not have your Cinque Terre Card activated, the ticket will cost €2.50 if purchased on the bus, or €1.50 if pre-purchased in Park office. This shuttle runs along via Fegina from the parking lot (on your right) to Piazza Garibaldi, just beyond the tunnel (on your left).

Monterosso's has three official TAXI companies and often there is one waiting outside the train station. There is no official taxi stand, so you may need to telephone (mobile +39 335 6165842, +39 335 6280933, +39 335 6165845). It will cost about €10 to get you to your hotel/rooms in the old town.

If DRIVING A CAR to Monterosso, see my suggestions at the beginning of this chapter. A few miles above Monterosso, the road forks, one leading to the old town (Monterosso Centro Storico) or the new town (Monterosso Fegina). I suggest you choose Fegina because of its big sea-side parking lot with security. Parking costs €25/24 hours and you can find a spot here most anytime, except during busy weekends in the summer.

Other Useful Information

Emergencies

112 is an EU emergency number. Calls can be answered in 40 languages.

Additionally, in Italy, dial 112 for Carabinieri, 113 for the State Police, 118 for Medical Emergencies, 115 for the Fire Department, and 1515 for Forest Fires.

Dr. Vitone is listed as a local physician in Monterosso. He speaks English and will come to your hotel if needed. Tel. 338 853 0949.

Pharmacy

Look for the green cross to find one of several pharmacies (farmacia) in Monterosso. There is one at street-level at the train station on via Fegina. Tel. 0187 818391. Open Mon-Fri 08:00–12:30 & 16:00–19:30. Closed on the weekend.

Laundry

Wash and Dry Lavarapido is in the new town, just up from the seaside parking lot, behind Ristorante Miky. They offer same-day full service washing and drying. They will collect your dirty laundry at your hotel and bring it back clean, but I prefer to drop it off personally, as early as possible in the morning. Open daily 08:00-19:00. Via Molinelli 17. Mobile 339-484-0940. Very little English spoken here.

Luètu Lavanderia is in the old town up via Roma across from the post office. Open daily 08:00-20:00. Tel. 328 286 1908.

If you want your clothes washed, but not dried, mention lavare solo, non asciugare (la-var-reh non ah-shoe-gar-reh).

Food

Market Day is Thursday from about 08:00-13:00. Trucks roll in and set up in the old town square and under the train tracks.

There are several Grocery Stores in the town. Punto Market is in the new town, just behind Ristorante Miky. M-SAT 08:00-13:00 & 16:30-19:30. SUN 08:00-13:00. Crai Market is in the old town on via Roma, just beyond Hotel Margherita on the left. Via Roma, 61. Open daily 09:00-13:00 & 15:00-19:00.

Beaches and Swimming

Monterosso has the best beaches in the region. The new town has many private beaches with umbrellas and chairs for rent. Expect to pay about €22 a day for two lounge chairs and an umbrella. Prices are less in the afternoon and outside of the summer season. You'll also find paddleboats and kayaks for rent from some vendors on the north end of the beach. There are free beaches, open to the public, just in front of the train station, to the north near the soccer court and il Gigante statue, and in the old town harbor. Just look for places with no umbrellas and people laying around on towels. Unfortunately, you will be bothered by various illegal vendors selling dresses, towels, and massages. Just ignore them, say no thank you, and they will go away, eventually.

Private Boats and Skippers

Angelo's Boat Tours works out of Monterosso and have a great reputation. They offer tours throughout the day ranging from €100-€150 per person angelosboattours.com/. It is a small outfit run by Alessandro and Brenda, so book your voyage as soon as you know your travel dates.

Stefano works two boats that can accommodate 6 people each. About €100 per hour for the boat which can be split between up to 6 people. Mobile 333-821-2007. matildenavigazione.com. info@matildenavigazione.com.

Diego offers longer tours, sunset cruises, and more for up to 7 people. Prices vary from €120-€150 per hour. cinqueterreboat.com. 5sterretourfishandcholl@gmail.com

Walks in Monterosso

Begin in the old town, at the entrance to the tunnel, and walk up the stairs next to Albergo Pasquale. This leads to San Cristoforo hill. Soon, making a sharp right on the Salita dei Cappuccini, you'll come upon some zigzagging steps nicknamed Switch Back of the Friars (Zii de Frati). Pause for a look at the statue of St. Francis with a wolf and an amazing vista. Backtrack just a bit and continue going up to the San Cristoforo hill for views of the entire Cinque Terre coastline.

Here you will find the Convento dei Cappuccini (now only occupied by one caretaking

friar) and the Chiesa di San Francesco, dating to 1623. It, like many of the churches in the Cinque Terre, dates from a time known as the Romanesque period where the architectural style consisted of, thick walls, round arches with broad supporting pillars, large towers, symmetrical plans, frilly stone work, and striped façades. A painting of the crucifixion attributed to Van Dyck hangs in the church.

The nearby cemetery holds the ruins of an old castle and watchtower built to shelter the locals from raiders and pirates in the 13th century. The 16th-century Aurora Tower can be found at the foot of the hill. Continuing to the top of the hill you'll find a row of graves containing the remains of famous local priests. Turn away from the sea and look up the neighboring mountain finding the church steeple poking out above the trees. This is Monterosso's Santuario church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. All the villages have a similar place of refuge in the hills, high above the sea.

In the historical center of Montrosso, you can visit the 13th-century Gothic Church of San Giovanni Battista. Its bell tower originally served as a watchtower. The façade is comprised of alternating bands of white and green marble, and the interior features a rose window and a Baroque altar. Next door, find the Oratory of Confraternita dei Neri a place of worship for one of the local confraternities dedicated to arranging funerals, caring for widows, orphans, and the lost-at-sea. Nearby is another, the Ora-

tory of Confraternita dei Bianchi.

Dining in Monterosso

In the Old Town

Ristorante Ciak is always packed with happy eaters, inside and out, and for good reason: it is one of the best places in town! Signore Luigi Corciulo, better known as Ciak, and his wife Matilde opened this restaurant in 1974 promising to serve only traditional Ligurian cuisine. The kitchen is in full view and puts out fresh local seafood, fish, and pasta in huge terra-cotta bowls large enough to feed two to six people. Three popular choices are the local catch in a bowl of spaghetti, risotto, or broth. The gnocchi al pesto is fantastic and the whole fresh fish grilled and split between 3 or 4 people is a feast. Piazza Don Minzoni, 6. Tel. 0187-817-014. Open March-December. Closed Wednesday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 18:00-22:30. Make a reservation for the best seating. ristoranteciak.net inforistoranteciak@gmail.com

L'Osteria is a small place with packed indoor seating and a few tables outside. Alessandro and his wife run a great kitchen serving fresh seafood and pasta. All the deserts are fresh and homemade each day. Closed Monday. Open other days 12:00-14:30 & 19:00-21:30. Via Vittorio Emanuele, 5. Tel. 0187 819224.

Cà du Scienza is a bit more upscale than others in the old town. They offer fresh seafood, fish and meat dishes prepared in an eclectic and

international style. Big dining room upstairs with a balcony overlooking the square and outside dining in the summer. Service is a bit slow and, if dining outside, bring mosquito repellent (as with anywhere in this outdoor square). Also offered are items such as Caesar salad, beef, and chicken dishes. Open daily 12:30-15:00 & 18:30-23:00 with street food served 15:00-18:00. Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi, 17. Tel. 0187 800659. cadusciensa.com/

Bar Centrale is my go-to place in the old town for a pre-dinner appetitivo. Cheap drinks are served with snacks from about 18:30. Open daily 07:00-24:00. Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi, 10. Tel. 0187 817690.

[In the New Town](#)

Miky is always packed with well-dressed locals and savvy travelers. Dress up a bit, don't wear beach clothes to dinner. It is family-owned and run with attention to detail, proper service, and pride. Their menu features thoughtfully presented seafood, pasta, and risotto in the classical Ligurian style. Reservations recommended. Closed Tuesday. Open other days 12:00-14:30 & 19:00-23:00. Via Fegina 104. Tel. 0187 817608. www.ristorantemiky.it/index.html; miky@ristorantemiky.it; info@ristorantemiky.it

La Cantina di Miky is run by Manuel (Miky's son) and his wife Christine. They offer a more informal and relaxed setting than the nearby restaurant. Located on the seaside promenade,

there is seating outside with sea views, in a secluded garden, or downstairs inside. The food is traditional, fresh and tasty. Try the mixed fried seafood, pesto lasagna, the anchovies starter plates, and the local craft beer. Closed Wednesday. Open other days 12:00-21:30. Via Fegina, 90. Phone: 0187 802525. cantinadimiky.it; lacantinadimiky@gmail.com.

Takeaway and Quick Bites in the New Town Focacciaria Antonio Di Liberatore is my favorite place to pick up a takeaway lunch. Walk in, choose your focaccia, tell the lady at the counter what size, take the ticket, pay the boss lady at the cash register down to the right, get the printed receipt, give back to the lady at the counter who will be waiting on you with your order to go in a sack. Lots of trays of focaccia from which to choose. I like onion (cipolla), tomato (pomodoro), and a mixture with ham. Closed Thursday. Open other days 07:30-20:00. Via Fegina, 120. Tel. 0187 829039.

Enoteca 5 Terre di Sassarini Giancarlo is located on the seaside promenade between the two Miky restaurants. This is a good place to get an aperitivo, a glass of wine, and some snacks. Good for people watching too. Open daily early to late. Via Fegina, 94. Tel. 0187 818063.

Vernazza (Population 852)

This is perhaps the most photogenic village and harbor in the area. It is also the most well-discovered, crowded, and touristy. Consequently, it's best to visit early or late when the

day-trippers have packed up and gone home. Because of its natural harbor, the town became active in sea trade after coming under the control of Genoa in the 13th century. It is dominated by the ruins of the castles and bastions built to protect it. The Church of Santa Margherita di Antiochia, built in 1318, stands in the small square overlooking the seaside.

Getting to and from Vernazza

The TRAIN station is located near the top of town on via Roma. There are two tracks at the train station. If arriving from the south, you'll hop off at platform (binario) 1 (from the north it's platform 3). You will have to walk down a flight of stairs to exit the station. From there, the harbor is downhill about 100 meters. Walking uphill, takes you to the top of town, the river and the parking garage.

Do not DRIVE TO VERNAZZA

Other Useful Information

Laundry

There is a small self-service laundry at the top of town near the post office. Open daily 07:00-23:00.

Food

Market Day is Thursday from about 08:00-13:00. Don't get your hopes up, there isn't much to it.

There is a Grocery Store in the town center. The Coop 5 Terre is at via Roma, 39. Open Daily 07:00-13:00 & 16:30-19:00.

Beaches and Swimming

The harbor has a sort of dirty sandy cove where fishermen once dragged their boats ashore. In the summer, you'll find kids playing in the sand and people spreading their towels to lay in the sun. I don't get in the water here. I've seen the local cats using it as their litter box in the evening. However, the harbor has a fine walkway stretching below the church and around to the rocks on the far right. There is a shower in the alcove beneath the church. Bring your towel and find a place to spread it out on the rocks. As you can imagine, the rocks are hard. But they are flat too and the swimming here is great if you like deep water swimming.

Private Boats and Skippers

At the harbor you'll find Vernazza Water Taxi. Mobile- 338-911-869 [vernazzawatertaxi.it](mailto:info@vernazzawatertaxi.it)
info@vernazzawatertaxi.it

Nord Est offers water taxi service to the other villages. Mobile- 338-700-0436. info@nord-est-vernazza.com.

Plan on spending €30-€50 on a one-way trip to one of the other villages for a 6-passenger boat with an outboard motor.

Dining in Vernazza

Don't waste your time dining somewhere other than a place with a view of the sea or harbor. There are many places from which to choose and all restaurants must serve good, fresh food in order to stay in business in this busy tourist town. A good plan is to scope out the choices during the lunch hour and then book a table

with a view for the evening. This way, you see what you are getting both from a food and ambience standpoint.

On the Harbor

Gianni Franzi has been right here since the first time I visited the Cinque Terre. Typical regional seafood, friendly and quick service. Outdoor seating is preferred if the weather is good. The indoor dining room is nice too. Closed Wednesday, except in August. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Tel. 0187-812-228. Book a table online at giannifranzi.it

Gambero Rosso is a bit pricier and more upscale than the other places on the harbor and it is not locally owned. That's not necessarily a bad thing, just giving all the information. I've always enjoyed dinner here. Typical seafood and pasta, good service, and good ambience. They do also have some beef and pork dishes. Closed Thursday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:30. Tel. 0187 812265. ristorante-gamberorosso.net

Burgus Enoteca is not a restaurant, it is an old family-owned wine bar. Outside tables crowd the steps to the harbor, but the view can't get any better. Inside, it is standing room only. During the apperitivo hour, order a drink inside, stand at the bar, and eat all the snacks you want. This is a good value. The bar is located on the harbor, just to the right of the church. Open every day, all day and night. Via G. M.

Pensa, 3.

[Above the Harbor](#)

Ristorante al Castello is owned by Monica and her husband, Massimo. I met them many years ago on my first visit to Vernazza and have been coming back ever since. The restaurant is up some steep stairs just below the castello. The views from their dining terrace are fantastic. Try to arrive for sunset! Now for the food: you've got to try their lasagna al pesto. The frito misto (mixed fried fish and seafood) is a good follow-up to the lasagna. Their house wine is local and good. Closed Wednesday and Nov to April. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Tel. 0187-812-296. Via Guidoni, 56, head up the stairs to the right of Ganni Franzini and follow the signs.

Corniglia (Population 150)

Perched 100 meters above the coast, this is the smallest and quietest village. From the train station, there are 385 steps to reach the town. Don't worry; you can also take the bus, which is usually waiting outside the station with the arrival of each train. The 14th-century Church of San Pietro is one of the best examples of the Ligurian Gothic style and has a rose window made of Carrara marble and a 12th-century christening font.

[Getting to and from Corniglia](#)

The TRAIN station is at sea level. There are two tracks at the train station. If arriving from the south, you'll hop off at platform (bina-

rio) 1 (from the north it's platform 2) and walk through the tunnel running under the tracks to reach the station. Exiting the station, cross the road, and head left to the stairs. Try to connect with the ATC SHUTTLE BUS that is usually waiting on the road in front of the station.

If DRIVING A CAR park on the road beyond the switchback stairs. Only residents can park between Villa Cecio and the stairs. Beyond that, parking is €2.00/hour with a maximum of €10 a day.

Wander around Corniglia

There is not much to particularly see or do in this village. There is one street leading through the hilltop village and it is flanked with several grocery stores, wine bars, gelato shops, and a few restaurants. The main square on Largo Taragio is filled with tables under shade trees and a couple of bars and restaurants. The Santa Maria Belvedere viewpoint is at the end of town and offers great views of the mountains and the harbor and sea below.

Manarola (Population 450)

I used to think of Manarola as the forgotten village, but nowadays, it is loaded with day-tripping cruise excursions, huge tour groups, and us measly tourists hoping for a quiet village. Avoid the hours from 10:00-16:00 and you'll love it!

The town itself is 200 meters through a tunnel from the train station. Emerging from the tun-

nel, you'll have a choice to make: the harbor or the hilltop church. If you turn right and walk uphill for about 20 minutes, it brings you to the Piazza Papa Innocenzo IV, which offers an amazing view of the sea. In this square you'll find the Church of San Lorenzo, built in 1338, with its Gothic façade and Baroque interior. There is also an oratory and bell tower in the square. If you turn left at the tunnel exit, follow the steps up to the town "square," down some more steps, and follow Via Renato Birolli to the harbor.

Getting to and from Manarola

The TRAIN station is located at sea level. From the station, follow the tunnel to town.

The ATC SHUTTLE BUS won't help you much here unless you plan to go to the Piazza Papa Innocenzo IV and points beyond. The ATC bus stop is halfway up the main street near the post office.

Do not DRIVE TO MANAROLA unless you have a reservation at a hotel or B&B. There is no parking provided other than for accommodations and locals.

Swimming

The harbor is the swimming spot. It is the best deep-water and cliff-diving spot in the Cinque Terre. Sunbathers claim a spot on the steep boat ramp leading down to the water. There is a shower nearby. Others work their way out onto the rocky jetties to find a flat spot in the sun. There is another rocky place to swim farther

down the trail towards Corniglia, but it is more of a challenge to get in and out of the water.

A Walk through the Vineyards

Don't miss this experience! Even if you don't feel up to hiking one of the coastal trails, this is a less strenuous but still rewarding experience. The trail begins at the top of town near the Piazza Papa Innocenzo IV, wanders around the rim of the valley loaded with the terraced dry-stone walls, vineyards, citrus groves, and private vegetable gardens. The trail is officially known as 502C Via del Presepe di Manarola and is about 1 mile in length. The trail can be done in either direction, beginning at the harbor or the church at the top of the village. I'll describe it from the harbor.

From the harbor, follow the wide paved trail around to the right, up the hill, ending at the scenic viewpoint (Punta Bonfiglio) on the small peninsula jutting into the sea. Here, you'll find a park, playground, benches, and the Ristorante Nessun Dorma. Staying on the path above the restaurant, continue to the entrance of the local cemetery.

This cemetery is typical of all others in the Cinque Terre. In the early 1800's, Napoleon Bonaparte was the king of Italy (and a lot of other regions in Europe as well). He decided cemeteries were unhealthy and a cause for sickness and disease, so he ordered them to be built outside the cities and towns. Here in the hilly Cinque Terre, that meant high on a hill

with grand sea vistas. There is a hierarchy in cemeteries such as these: the graveyard, a large enclosed area known as a *locolo*, a mini bone holder (*ossario*), and communal ossuary. Since there is limited space up here on these rugged hills, there is a specific length of time the bones can be held in the first three burial places. After about a generation, the bones are removed to the communal ossuary.

These burial spots are near and dear to the living relatives' hearts. Consequently, you'll find white Carrara marble memorials with embedded photos of the dearly departed. It is almost compulsory that the local living relatives make a weekly trip to the cemetery to say a prayer, tidy up the area, and install fresh flowers on their loved one's memorial.

Exit the cemetery, turn left, and then make an immediate left up the path going along the cemetery's outer wall. After about 100 meters, find the steep concrete stairs on the right and climb slowly to the top. Take a breather!

At the top, turn right and walk the rest of the relatively flat trail through the terraced vineyards, groves, and gardens. You'll have fantastic vistas out to the sea and the village of Manarola sprawling below and above on the adjacent hill. This path is named *Via del Presepe di Manarola* in honor of Mario Andreoli, a local resident who has placed wooden religious scenes in his vineyard. The story goes that before his father died, Mario promised

to replace the old wooden cross in the family vineyard. Once he got started, he never quit. Notice there are lights attached to many of the scenes. On religious holidays, the place is illuminated with scenes such as the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, the Nativity, and more.

Continue on a mostly level path around the lip of the valley. As it curves to the right, the path will intersect with Manarola's main street, just downhill from the Church of San Lorenzo. Walk up to the church to enjoy the wide sweeping vistas. Walking downhill, the road winds through town to the tunnel leading to the railroad station. But, before you head downhill, look over the railings along the side of the road. Notice the river running about 20 feet below. All these villages in the Cinque Terre were originally built along a river cutting its way from the mountains to the sea. It was not until the turn of the 20th century that these rivers were covered with a viaduct, which became the main street of the village.

Riomaggiore

This is the southernmost village. Trains arrive at the station in the small square known as Piazza Rio Finale, which contains a bar, the park service office, and a fountain. Go to the right, through the tunnel, to arrive in the old town on its main street, via Colombo. Walking up the hill on the paved road, via Telemaco Signorini, to the left takes you, eventually, to either the castle or the piazza at the church St. John the Baptist. If you are looking for a taxi, you may

find one here. Otherwise, telephone and ask for one.

At the end of the tunnel, the main “street” continues uphill to the left. If you turn right and go down the stairs, you’ll reach the harbor and beach.

Walking up the ancient cobbled street to the left will bring you past shops selling food, wine and beach stuff. The street is lined with bars serving local wine and good food. There are several pizzerias as well.

This part of town is surrounded by terraces. The Church of San Giovanni Battista was originally built in 1340, but the façade was rebuilt in the 19th century in a Neo-Gothic style. The marble doors, rose window, crucifix and organ are worth a visit, and there is a nice view of the village from the square.

A castle stands atop the hill to the northwest of the village. It was most likely built in the 13th century to protect against attacks from the sea. Today it is used as a conference center and boasts wonderful panoramic views of the coast. The Oratory of San Rocco, next to the castle, was built in the 15th century in remembrance of those who died from the plague. A cliff-hanging trail leads from the beach to old Nazi bunkers and a hilltop botanical garden.

[Getting to and from Riomaggiore](#)

The TRAIN station is in away from the village

in Piazza Rio Finale. You must walk through a 150-meter tunnel to reach Riomaggiore's main street, via Colombo. There are two tracks at the train station. If arriving from the south, you'll hop off at platform (binario) 1 (from the north it's platform 2) and walk through the tunnel running under the tracks to reach the station.

The ATC SHUTTLE BUS travels up and down Riomaggiore's main street, via Colombo, on a sporadic schedule. There is nowhere to go here but uphill, so if you can catch the ATC bus, it will make your trek easier. Since you'll probably not have your Cinque Terre Card activated, the ticket will cost €2.50 if purchased on the bus, or €1.50 if pre-purchased in Park office. This shuttle runs up to the top of via Colombo, then turns left going to the castle, and then heads out of town towards the cemetery and point beyond.

If DRIVING A CAR to Riomaggiore, see my suggestions at the beginning of this chapter. There are two multi-story parking garages at the top of town. Spaces here are €3.50/hour or €24 per day. Some hotels have parking, so ask before you arrive and have a spot reserved, if possible.

Taxi

5 Terre Transfer & Taxi is run by a couple of locals who do a great job of getting you around Riomaggiore, to any of the other villages, or to La Spezia. Give them a call for a short or long ride. Marzio 340-356-5268; Luciana 339-130-

1183. 5terretransfer.com; 5terretransfer@libero.it

Other Useful Information

Pharmacy

Look for the “Green Cross” on the left about 50 meters up via Colombo, 182. They are open in the morning and afternoon and observe the pausa in the middle of the day. Tel. 0187 920160

Laundry

Wash & Dry Lavarapido

There is a self-service laundry on via Colombo, just up the street/hill from Bar Centrale. Likely to be open 08:30-20:00 daily.

Food

There are several Grocery Stores in the town. Dellara Franca is on via Colombo, on the right as you exit the tunnel from the train station. There is a Co-op Grocery up via Colombo, across from the laundry. They are open in the morning and afternoon and observe the pausa in the middle of the day.

Baggage Storage and Transport

The bar across from the train station will hold your bags for €5/day. If you need help getting your bags up to your hotel in Riomaggiore or to another village, they can help too. Give Roberto a call. Tel. 329-896-6219. Bar open daily 08:30-19:00. Likely closed November-March.

Beaches and Swimming

Riomaggiore's stone-scattered beach is located beyond the harbor. From the bottom of via Colombo, walk down the steps and go through the tunnel. Not the tunnel to the train station, there is another. You'll exit at the village's little harbor. From there, work your way around to the left, and keep going on the narrow path until you see the cove and beach. If swimming, I'd suggest water shoes, there are rocks everywhere. Bring a towel and some padding for sunbathing, there is not a soft spot on the beach. Showers are up near the cliff.

Dive Center 5 Terre is located in the tunnel on the route to the beach. They rent kayaks, snorkeling and scuba gear, and offer scuba lesson and dive trips. 0187-920-011. Open in the summer and during good weather.

Dining in Riomaggiore

I am not particularly fond of the restaurants in Riomaggiore. There are better choices in the other villages. However, I do recommend the following places that serve good quality local fare.

Trattoria La Lampara is at the foot of via Colombo, on the left as you exit the tunnel. They offer indoor and balcony seating on the street. BTW, you'll see "La Lampara" in every village. The term refers to the lamp the fishermen use when fishing at night to attract the fish their way. This "La Lampara" offers fresh seafood. I like the spaghetti alla vongole (clams), and

stuffed mussels. The restaurant has an upscale vibe with friendly service.

Bar Centrale is about halfway up via Colombo, on the left. They have outdoor service, with tables under a covered area on the street. Good for drinks, snacks, and quick eats. They offer a full menu that is good for lunch, but I prefer to dine elsewhere for dinner.

Enoteca & Ristorante Dua Cila is down by the harbor, immediately on the right when you exit the tunnel from town. Good fresh seafood and antipasti di mare. I have fond memories of this place from years back when I ordered a whole sea bass that was too big for me to finish it all. I shared it with about half the restaurant and there was still some left over! Open daily 12:00-24:00. Via San Giacomo, 65. Tel. 0187-760-032.

Traditional Cuisine and Vino

Seafood and fresh fish reign supreme here in the region of Liguria. Years ago, fishermen would set out each evening for these villages, fish all night, and arrive back in the harbor by daylight. Locals would gather at the docks in the early morning to purchase the fresh seafood and fish and take it home to cook for lunch and dinner. That still happens nowadays in the Cinque Terre, but on a much smaller scale. Today, there may be only a handful of fishermen going out each evening from the Cinque Terre, but they do return each morning with a fresh catch. This local catch is supplemented by oth-

er fishermen in the surrounding towns up and down the Liguria coastline to help put fresh and delicious seafood on the menu.

Acciughe – The ubiquitous fish here is the anchovy. In Italian it sounds tastier, acciughe! Try to pronounce it like this: ah-CHEW-gay. First thing to forget is the oily, slimy, salty anchovies packed in a tin in your granddad's cupboard. Also, forget about sardines, it not the same fish. The acciughe found on the tables of Cinque Terre restaurants are fresh and arrive on your plate in great variety. You find them raw, fried, marinated, salted, butterflied, whole, swimming in lemon juice, or served with dipping sauce. They are so plentiful that chefs take pride in their unique way in which to prepare and present them to their guests. These small fish swim in large schools with annual runs from the Atlantic Ocean, through the Straits of Gibraltar, and along the Mediterranean coasts of Spain, France, and Italy. At night, fishermen put out powerful lights to attract the acciughe to their nets. The next day, they are on your table for lunch!

Acciughe make their most dramatic culinary appearance on the antipasti frutti di mare piatti, that is the plate(s) of mixed fruits of the sea. This is a staple started in many restaurants and the chef takes pride in the way in which he can show off these tasty bites. In addition to acciughe, your starter will include squid, mussels, shrimp, cuttlefish, and filleted fish all heavily drizzled with olive oil and fresh lemon juice.

This starter platter could include up to ten plates and is certainly enough to feed two or three people. Even if you don't like fish, try it and split the order amongst the table.

With this description, you'd think acciughe were the only thing to eat, but there's lots more. Here is my rundown of the fine food and wine from the region.

Tegame alla vernazzana – This is a typical dish from Vernazza. It is a casserole-esque dish consisting of layers of anchovies, potatoes, tomatoes, local white wine, oil, and herbs.

Muscoli ripieni – Stuffed mussels are cooked and stuffed with a dressing similar to our stuffed crab in the USA.

Branzino & Orata – Seabass and Seabream. These are whole fish, the seabass (not to be confused with Chilean Seabass) is large, up to 5 or 6 pounds. The seabream is smaller, 1 pound or less. These are usually grilled or roasted whole and cooked with potatoes and vegetables. The whole fish is presented table-side on a platter and drizzled with olive oil, lemon, salt, and pepper. Most waiters will debone the fish and take away the head and tail, but only after you see it. Speaking of seeing it, be sure to ask to see the fish, raw and uncleaned, before you decide to buy it. Whole fresh fish should have a very mild fish scent, its eyes bright and bulging, and its gills should be bright red or pink. Fresh fish are sold by the kilogram (1 Kg = 2.2 pounds). Figure 0.5kg of whole uncleaned fish per person will yield

about 8 ounces of cooked fish.

Gamberetti – Generally speaking, shrimp is smaller than what we have in the USA. Most likely it will have its head and legs attached and it will not be deveined. If served as part of the antipasti frutti di mare, it will be presented without head, tail, legs and will be deveined. These are often served deep-fried along with other sea critters.

Calamari – that is the Italian word for squid! It comes raw or boiled in cold salads and antipasti dishes drizzled in olive oil. It is also deep-fried like commonly seen in the USA.

Seppia – Cuttlefish is similar to squid and octopus, except it has a head and teeth, sort of. It is famous for its ink sac which holds black ink that has a rich sea(weed) flavor. It is usually paired with pasta or risotto.

Vongole – Clams are most often served with pasta in a rich wine and herb sauce.

Pesto- Liguria has perfect weather from growing basil and you'll find it growing in every garden or orto you pass while walking to town or on the trails. Long ago, it was discovered that mixing basil, parmigiano and pecorino cheese, pine nuts, garlic, and olive oil then grinding it all together into a paste makes a tasty concoction. You'll find jars of pesto available in all the shops and grocery stores ready for you to pack up and take home. But try some here first! My favorite is pesto lasagna

where layers of pasta are slathered with pesto and baked to perfection. Il Castello in Vernazza and Cantine di Miky in Monterosso serve some of the best. You'll also find pesto on gnocchi, a fresh pasta made from mashed potatoes, flour, and eggs. The best is at Ristorante Ciak in Monterosso where if you walk by the kitchen window in the late afternoon, you'll find Signore Ciak and his crew making this and other delights. Pesto is also added to trofie (a short and dense pasta made from flour and a bit of potato) and trenette (long, flat, and wide pasta). All the pasti mentioned above are made with ridges or dimples to give the pesto something to stick to.

Focaccia has its origins here in Liguria as well. The dough is spread thin, punched with fingers, and sprinkled with salt and water, then baked on a sheet pan. This results in a large sheet of baked bread resembling a pillow made by all the finger holes. These holes, like the pesto pastas mentioned above, are designed to capture the various topping and give more flavor. They come with many toppings, onions (cipolli), tomatoes (pomodori), ham (prosciutto), mushrooms (funghi), and other delights.

You'll find focaccia being made at a shop called a focacceria. One of my favorites is Focacceria Antonio Di Liberatore in Monterosso.

Vino delle Cinque Terre – this white wine is produced locally in all the villages and in a couple of other towns in the province of La

Spezia, but nowhere else! The wine is made from grapes grown on the terraced hillside that you see everywhere in the Cinque Terre.

The grapes are mostly Bosco and Albarola, although some producers include Vermentino. Many restaurants serve local table wine in a carafe ordered by the liter, half-liter, or by the bottle. More expensive wines (€15-€30 per bottle) have a government label certifying the wine was produced from grapes grown in the Cinque Terre region. This is known as DOC (Denominazione di Origine Controllata). This regulation defines the production area, wine color, permitted grape varieties and proportions, styles of wine, minimum and maximum alcohol levels. Cinque Terre DOC wine must contain at least 40% of the local Bosco grape, but may also contain up to 40% of both Vermentino and Albarola. The final 20% can contain white varieties approved by the local wine consortium. You can't find this wine outside the Cinque Terre! So, even if you don't like wine, go there and give this unique crisp and dry wine a try. It pairs perfectly with the local cuisine!

Finally, there are two liqueur drinks that may be offered after dinner as a digestivo. Limoncello (Limoncino) is made from local lemon juice, sugar, and strong alcohol such as grappa or vodka. It tastes sweet, tart, and lemony. Sciacchetrà (shah-keh-TRAH) is made from grapes that have been left on the vine almost until they are raisins. Once picked, the small

amount of juice is squeezed out resulting in a very sweet and 18% alcoholic finish.

Events and Festivals

Check these websites for up-to-date information on festivals and special events in the Cinque Terre region. lamialiguria.it and cinqueterre.it

