

A hiking and gastronomic experience tour

Hiking and gastronomy tourism can offer ideal opportunities to create extraordinary holiday experiences. If carefully planned, a culinary hiking tour can give visitors the opportunity to savour the unmistakable flavour of a destination through all five senses. Walking through vineyards, lush olive groves and exotic plants and flowers, climbing and descending steps and narrow passages may be physically strenuous, but when the views are absolutely stunning it is also rewarding. Besides, if the hikers have the pleasure of tasting a product where it is actually made, this makes them learn to appreciate the link between such a product and its region of origin. When a product is an essential ingredient of an exquisite local dish, tourists not only enjoy a gastronomic experience, they also get to experience the host community's culture.

A Three-Day Hiking Tour in the Cinque Terre

Blending the beauty of nature with gastronomic delights

Hiking in the **Cinque Terre** is one of the best things to do in Italy. Here the hiking trails are among the most beautiful in Europe, and for those who love outdoor activities and enjoy good Italian food, this is one of the most rewarding ways to enjoy Italy's spectacular coastline.

But when you hike the Cinque Terre you need to be well informed about trail difficulties and you have to know what to pack when you go there.

Nature and history have conspired to create the towns known as the Cinque Terre. The landscape here is so unique that in 1997 it was listed as a world heritage site under the protection of UNESCO. Agriculture, together with the ancient art of fishing practised in an uncontaminated sea, represents the major strength of this territory. A strength that, not without countless sacrifices, produces the famous white wine of the Cinque Terre as well as *Sciacchetra*, a dessert wine made from partially-dried grapes, oil of a particular olive fragrance and finally, the



famous anchovies. The nature park and the marine park have created new opportunities for visitors, who can embark on spectacular sea or mountain excursions, relax in the silence broken only by the crashing of the waves, or wander lazily through the *carruggi*, narrow and winding alleys typical of the local villages, discovering for themselves the local crafts, the age-old activities of peasants and sea folk; or just simply wander in search of a table to sit at and sample the anchovies and white wine of the Cinque Terre.

TOUR PLAN

Departure:	from Milan by coach on Friday mornings (from April to September)
Arrival:	at Monterosso al Mare at about 9am
Accommodation:	four-star hotel
Nights:	two
Transport:	coach/train
Meals:	breakfast/three midday lunches
Guide:	professional guide
Price:	450 euros
Not included:	evening meals and any extras

DAY 1 – FRIDAY



Arrival by coach at about 9am in **Monterosso al Mare** and check in at a four-star hotel. Monterosso, one of the Cinque Terre, is where the poet Eugenio Montale, Nobel prizewinner for literature in 1975, spent many years. It is in the house where he lived and in the lemon groves sloping down to the sea that he wrote his great literary work, *Ossi di Seppia*.

At about 10am we are ready to begin our two-hour walk to **Vernazza**. This part of the walk has lots of steps and narrow passages. It's a section of trail in which hikers often need walking sticks and trekking poles. It's also the most rewarding view.

Its panorama of all five Cinque Terre towns is one of the highlights of the trip.

We will follow **the Blue Path** which goes from Monterosso al Mare to **Riomaggiore**, passing through all the five villages of the Cinque Terre. **The Blue Path** is the most famous network of hiking trails in the Cinque Terre. It is made up of four individual paths along the coast.

Setting off from **Piazza Garibaldi** in the historic centre of Monterosso we go up the little road which follows the cliffs until we get to the Porta Roca Hotel. Some steps to our right and we find the trail indications which mark the beginning of the path. We walk for about two hours through vineyards and olive groves and finally come to a ridge, from which we can admire the bay of Vernazza in all its magic. The descent continues steeply down the steps and cobblestones, and soon we reach the church of **St. Mary of Antioch**. From here, going down the last set of steps, we get to the village square. Here we take a break and have our meal at an old *trattoria* in the square. We can start our meal with batter-fried anchovies; move on to homemade ravioli filled with ricotta and served with fish sauce, followed by fish baked with tomatoes and potatoes. We can taste local wines and choose to round off our meal with *bruciata allo sciacchetra*, a local sweet. After eating we can visit Vernazza, then we head back by train to Monterosso, where we can spend the rest of the day at the beach.

DAY 2 – SATURDAY

In the morning we take the train to Vernazza and begin the second part of our hiking adventure – a 4-kilometre walk from Vernazza to **Corniglia**. This trail climbs up to the highest point of the Cinque Terre (and back down) so expect



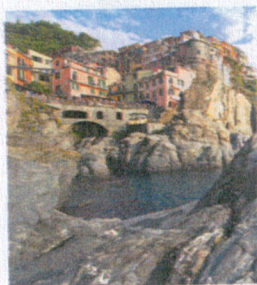
a fair amount of climbing and descending. Officially graded as 'medium difficulty', the trail features stone steps, but they tend to be quite steep, uneven and not always well-

kept. Trekking poles or a walking stick are recommended for walkers who like a little extra help on steep inclines.

From **Vernazza square** on the seafront, we go north along Via Roma, the town's main road, until we come to a chapel. To the right of this chapel some steps lead past old houses at the upper edge of the village, towards an old look-out and defence tower: the path to Corniglia starts from here. It's a long walk which, after a number of twists and turns, brings us to an altitude of 200 metres. Then we start a steep descent. When we come to a fork in the road, we make a detour from the path and go down to **Guvano Beach**, a remarkable little bay wedged into an inaccessible inlet, and a naturists' paradise. After this we pick up the planned route and finally reach Corniglia, perched high on the summit of a rocky headland. Here we can take a welcome break and have our meal. At the restaurant we can taste pasta with pesto or walnut sauce, and *Ratatouia*, a dish of garden vegetables with herbs which recalls the cooking of times gone by.

After visiting the village, we go back to Monterosso by train.

DAY 3 - SUNDAY



In the morning we take a train to Corniglia and there embark on the final part of our hiking trip: a 4-kilometre walk from Corniglia to **Manarola** and Riomaggiore.

We leave the village square and turn right along the roadway; after a few metres some steps, 365 in total, lead off to the right, heading down towards the sea. This is the path that leads us to Manarola. Here we can stop and visit the village church

of **San Lorenzo e Natività di Maria**, dating back to 1338 from a tablet on the façade. In the upper part of the village there are two gates called **Porta Rossa** and **Porta Baluardo**. During the Christmas period this little road is the best place from which to admire the magnificent sight of the *Presepe* adorning the hillside. The crib is the work of Mario Andreoli and in winter Manarola is worth a visit for this alone. From Via Discovolo we take the foot tunnel leading to the railway station. Behind the station building, a steep stairway takes us to the start of the **Via dell'Amore**. This path takes us to the village of **Riomaggiore**. The walk is entirely carved out of the rock overhanging the sea. At the end of the path we enter a tunnel with large windows covered in declarations of love! Then we start to descend by shallow steps until we reach the square of Riomaggiore where the *Blue Path* ends. After a short visit to Riomaggiore we take the *Via dell'Amore* where we have our meal in a charming restaurant.

Here we can start with twelve assorted hors d'œuvres, then try risotto with seafood and curry and fish. For dessert, homemade pear tart with pine kernels, or lemon cream with *cantucci* (sweet biscuits) will make the perfect end to a good lunch.

We go back to Monterosso by train, check out from our hotel and leave by coach for Milan.

