

WALKING IN ITALY'S CINQUE TERRE



About the Author

Gillian Price has trekked throughout Asia and the Himalayas but now lives in Venice and is exploring the mountains and flatter bits of Italy and the Mediterranean. Starting with the Italian Dolomites, Gillian has written outstanding Cicerone guides to walking all over Italy as well as Corfu and Corsica. An adamant promoter of the use of public transport to minimise environmental impact, she is an active member of the Italian Alpine Club CAI. Check her out at www.gillianprice.eu.

Other Cicerone guides by the author

Across the Eastern Alps: E5

Alpine Flowers

Italy's Sibillini National Park

Shorter Walks in the Dolomites

The Tour of the Bernina

*Through the Italian Alps –
the GTA*

Trekking in the Alps (contributor)

*Trekking in the Apennines –
the GEA*

Trekking in the Dolomites

*Walking and Trekking in
Gran Paradiso*

Walking and Trekking on Corfu

Walking in Corsica

*Walking in Italy's Stelvio
National Park*

Walking in Sicily

Walking in the Dolomites

Walking in Tuscany

Walking in Umbria

Walking on the Amalfi Coast

Walking Lake Como and Maggiore

Walking Lake Garda and Iseo

Walks and Treks in the

Maritime Alps

WALKING IN ITALY'S CINQUE TERRE

MONTEROSSO AL MARE, VERNAZZA, CORNIGLIA,
MANAROLA AND RIOMAGGIORE

by Gillian Price

CICERONE

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL
www.cicerone.co.uk

© Gillian Price 2019

First edition 2019

ISBN: 978 1 85284 973 3

Printed in China on behalf of Latitude Press Ltd

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.



Route mapping by Lovell Johns www.lovelljohns.com

Contains OpenStreetMap.org data © OpenStreetMap

contributors, CC-BY-SA. NASA relief data courtesy of ESRI

Dedication

As well as my special companion Nicola, I was very fortunate to enjoy the company of dear Alison in the Cinque Terre. Her enthusiasm never flagged even when faced with endless flights of steep steps that always seemed to go uphill. (Could it have been the promise of gelato?)

Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/973/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

Register your book: To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at www.cicerone.co.uk.





















Front cover: A marvellous panoramic point overlooking the southern side of Vernazza (Walk 5)

CONTENTS

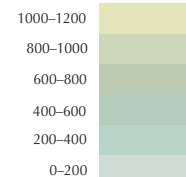
Map key	7
Overview Map	8
INTRODUCTION	11
Exploring the Cinque Terre	12
Walking	17
Plants and flowers	19
Wildlife	20
Getting there and getting around	21
Information	22
When to go	23
Accommodation	23
Food and drink	24
What to take	26
Maps	26
Dos and don'ts	27
Emergencies	29
Using this guide	30
WALKS	31
Walk 1 Levanto to Monterosso	32
Walk 2 Monterosso via Colla di Gritta circuit	36
Walk 3 Monterosso to Vernazza via the sanctuaries	41
Walk 4 Monterosso to Vernazza on the SVA	45
Walk 5 Vernazza to Corniglia on the SVA	49
Walk 6 Corniglia via Cigoletta and San Bernardino to Vernazza	53
Walk 7 Corniglia via Volastra to Manarola	58
Walk 8 Manarola panoramic loop	63
Walk 9 Manarola to Riomaggiore on Via Beccara	66
Walk 10 Riomaggiore high circuit	70
Walk 11 Riomaggiore low circuit	74
Walk 12 Riomaggiore to Porto Venere	77
Walk 13 Campiglia circuit via Monesteroli and Fossola	83
Walk 14 Punta Persico	87
Walk 15 Porto Venere and Monte Muzzerone	90
Walk 16 Palmaria island circuit	93
Appendix A Village maps	98
Appendix B Route summary table	102
Appendix C Useful information	103
Appendix D Glossary	104
Appendix E Accommodation	106



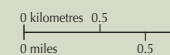
Symbols used on route maps

-  route
-  alternative route
-  start point
-  finish point
-  start/finish point
-  route direction
-  woodland
-  urban areas
-  station/railway
-  peak
-  building
-  church/monastery/cross
-  castle or tower
-  pass
-  bus stop
-  ferry
-  ferry route
-  tourist info
-  car park
-  other feature

Relief in metres

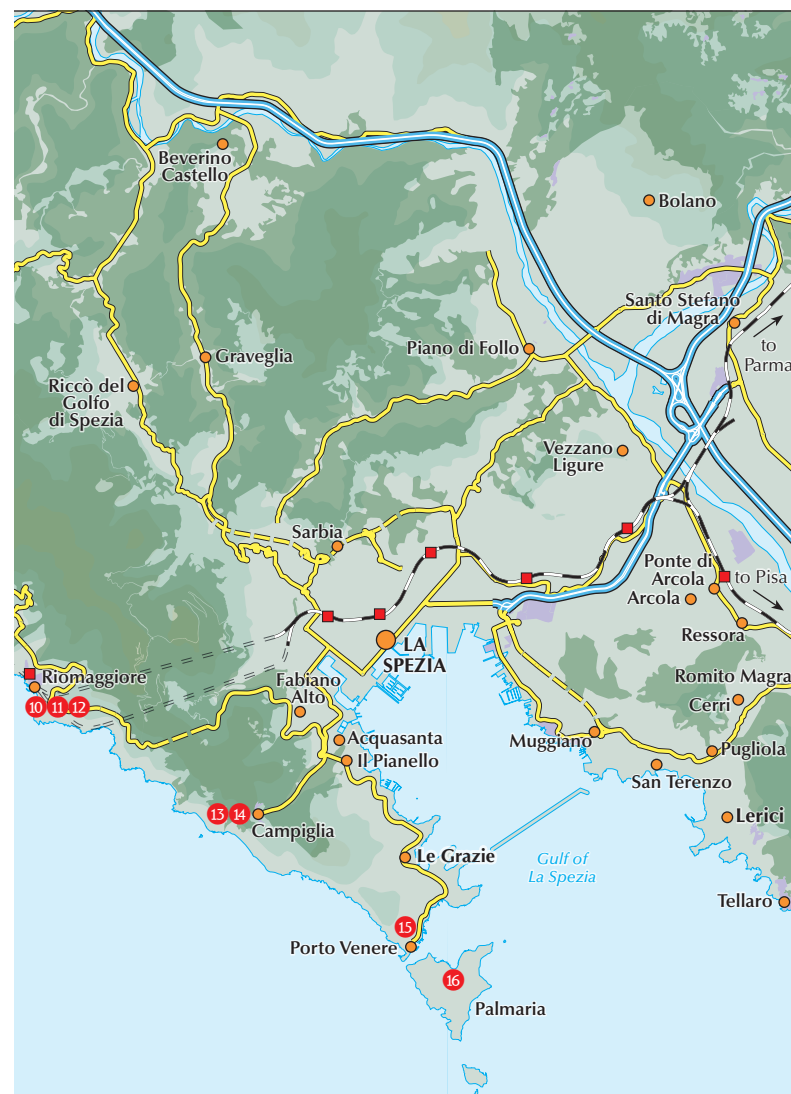


SCALE: 1:50,000



Contour lines are drawn at 25m intervals and highlighted at 100m intervals.

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at www.cicerone.co.uk/973/GPX.



Manarola has a magnificent setting



INTRODUCTION

The seafront of Riomaggiore is a celebrated spot around sunset



Pastel coloured villages are wedged into dizzy rock promontories over the sparkling sea, defying gravity. Between them, row upon row of man-made terraces appear to cascade down vertiginous mountainsides. Neck-craningly steep paths lead to spectacular lookouts that take your breath away. Secluded coves with turquoise water are the reward for venturing down hundreds of knee-challenging stone steps. Brilliant carpets of Mediterranean wildflowers add to the irresistible charm, as does the superb cuisine based on locally grown olives and wine. This is Liguria in north west Italy, and these are the Cinque Terre.

We're talking about a mere 12km of rugged coast that is home to gliding seagulls and the 'Famous Five'. There's nowhere else like it, and it is duly recognised with UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

So what exactly are the Cinque Terre? And why do people flock here from all over the globe? The 'five lands' as they translate literally, correspond to the villages of Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore. Nowadays the Cinque Terre are home to around 4400 residents in all, many of whom work in tourism. Starting in the late Middle Ages they were built up bit by bit

around narrow steep *aripaie* stairways and *carrugi* alleys suitable for donkeys and people. Every available scrap of land was exploited for the tower-like houses constructed one atop the other. Their coastal location set them up as vulnerable targets for raids by Saracen pirates who plagued the Ligurian coast for centuries and led to the construction of the many landmark watchtowers. As of the 1200s these were further fortified when the villages passed under the control of the mighty maritime republic of Genoa.

Land-based products such as wine, olives, oil, capers, citrus fruits and chestnut flour were once carried by man and mule downhill for shipping to market ports such as Genoa. The coast and villages are still linked one to the other – and the terraced fields – by ancient pathways, mostly with heart-stopping flights of stone steps. Due to the geography – hundreds of metres below a towering cliff ridge spelled isolation for centuries – the paths were the main way for the inhabitants to get around. (These days a handful of roads reach the seafloor settlements, while a landmark railway burrows through the mountainsides.) So what better way to explore this unique area than on foot? *Sentiero* is the Italian for ‘path’, and there’s certainly no lack of them here, all well marked and signposted. These are simply superb routes for walkers, who flock here to discover a paradise.

EXPLORING THE CINQUE TERRE

In addition to the five principal villages and hinterland which come under the protection of the Parco Nazionale Cinque Terre (www.parconazionale5terre.it) this guidebook includes neighbouring settlements that offer worthwhile pathways. These are seafloor Levanto in the north, mountainside Campiglia further down, then charming Porto Venere at the southern extremity on the opening of the Gulf of La Spezia. Each place has a distinct character and for different reasons makes a great base for a walking holiday. All are easily accessible by public transport, and have tourist and park info offices, ATM cash points, as well as grocery shops, cafés and restaurants, and masses of accommodation. The sole exception is Campiglia which has no info office or ATM. Helpful maps of the villages can be found in Appendix A.

Starting in the north west, **Levanto** is a natural entry gate to the Cinque Terre for visitors arriving by rail from the Ligurian regional capital of Genoa. The no-frills town has plenty of advantages, ranging from easy access, lower prices and a decent beach, though it is rather lacking in charm. Walk 1 starts its marvellous traverse here.

Separated from Levanto and the rest of the world by a high ridge culminating in the rugged headland of Punta Mesco, spread-out **Monterosso al Mare** (with a population of 1468) is the only one of the Cinque Terre to boast a beach worthy of that name

THE TERRACED LANDSCAPE

With the exception of Monterosso, the Cinque Terre were traditionally agricultural rather than being oriented towards fishing. Over the centuries some 2000 hectares (65% of the total land) of the outrageously steep hillsides from the water’s edge up to 400m above sea level have been crafted into immaculate terracing with *cian* or strips of arable land, by generation upon generation of hard-working farmers. The land first needed to be deforested, roots and rocks removed, then levelled out as far as possible. Soil was carried in, and using the stones removed earlier, painstakingly buttressed with the construction of a mind-boggling estimated 7000km of dry stone walls. Run-off channels were excavated alongside. The terracing requires regular expert maintenance to counter landslips and wall bulges that can lead to collapses and threaten paths. Crops such as olives are still grown as well as grapes. The traditional system for planting vines was referred to as the *vigna bassa* low vine, though arbours and rows have now replaced this. It has been calculated that each hectare of vineyard is supported by 4000m² of stone.

September is usually the time for the grape harvest, and the fruit is transported to a roadhead on ingenious monorails.

Terraced hillsides overlooking Corniglia





Magnificent Vernazza seen from a clifside path

– an inviting expanse of golden sand stretching along an ample bay. As well as a fair amount of level land, Monterosso has roads and a modern section called Fegina with a batch of hotels, not to mention a railway station. A pleasant seafront promenade runs through a road tunnel to the old *centro storico*, passing a watchtower occupying a rocky point. The great Italian poet Eugenio Montale, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1975, spent his childhood years on vacation here and the landscape is a constant in his work. Walks 2, 3 and 4 explore the wooded hills and coastal track starting here.

Next along is superbly photogenic **Vernazza** snuggling in a secluded cove. A modest pocket of sand and harbour protected by

breakwaters is overlooked by the elegant Romanesque church of Santa Margherita d'Antiochia. Uphill is a remnant of the Castello Doria, a Genoese construction with a medieval watchtower later converted into a windmill, not to mention its use as an anti-aircraft structure during the Second World War. The village name derives from Vulnetia, an ancient Roman family, though the first historical records date back to the 1000s. Once an independent village (that carried out its own raids!), it was brought under Genoa in 1211 and became a strategic base against arch rival Pisa. A delightful place to stay, Vernazza has 852 permanent inhabitants, a railway station carved into the hillside, and is the start for Walk 5.

The middle village of the five, charming **Corniglia** is by far the quietest thanks to its elevated position perched on a vertiginous cliff-top headland. This may explain the origin of its name from '*cornio*' rocky spur. From the railway station you go up the famous Scalinata Lardarina, a zigzagging brick stairway composed of 382 steps and 33 ramps – though there's also a bus run via the road. In addition to elegant churches and cosy houses, it boasts a belvedere terrace for legendary sunsets over the Ligurian Sea. The 195 resident numbers are boosted by those who move back in the warmer months, as happens in the other *terre*. Challenging Walks 6 and 7 begin at Corniglia.

The following stop is beautiful **Manarola**. Here a divine sheltered bay and harbour are popular with swimmers who clamber up rock pinnacles to dive into the clear blue sea. The houses here are squeezed into a narrow valley, leaving plenty of space for the extensive terraced vineyards above. The name may derive from *magna rota*, the large wheel of the water-driven mill that can still be seen in the main street – a convincing explanation as a river crossed by 11 stone bridges flowed here until the 1950–1970s when it was paved over. Another mammoth task was the long pedestrian tunnel that burrows under a cliff connecting the railway station. Walks 8 and 9 commence here. Manarola has 353 residents, counting

the upper hamlets such as lovely Volastra, visited on Walk 7.

The last of the Cinque Terre is lively **Riomaggiore**. According to local hearsay it was founded by eighth century Greeks fleeing persecution in their homeland. The name derives from the Rivus Major watercourse, now hidden away beneath tarmac. Over time Riomaggiore grew into a sizeable village, typical narrow alleys lined with tower-like buildings piled on top of each other and looked over by a humble castle; the last census gave a population of 1542. The seafront is an especially celebrated spot of an evening when the orange rays of the setting sun light up the coloured houses that appear to topple off the cliffs. Over winter the traditional fishing boats are dragged out of the water and 'parked' in piles to keep them safe during storms. Circuit Walks 10 and 11 begin here, as does the extended traverse Walk 12.

Perched at 400m altitude on a panoramic saddle boasting marvellous views looking both to the Gulf of La Spezia and over the Ligurian Sea, laidback **Campiglia** sees few visitors. With a permanent population of 60 that swells during the summer months, the mountainside hamlet is an inviting spot and is the start for Walks 13 and 14 that visit secluded coves. It has a good bus service to La Spezia and also offers groceries, a handful of restaurants and accommodation.

Another 'ring-in' in the south east is utterly charming **Porto Venere** that

WALK 1

Levanto to Monterosso

Start	Levanto railway station
Finish	Monterosso railway station
Distance	8.5km
Ascent	400m
Descent	400m
Grade	2
Walking time	2hr 45min
Refreshments	Case Lovara
Access	Trains on the La Spezia–Levanto line stop at Levanto and Monterosso.

A marvellously varied traverse across the lofty Punta Mesco headland, this route links Levanto with Monterosso, the first of the Cinque Terre villages, as well as the national park. It also doubles as the opening stage in the memorable multi-day trek from Levanto all the way to Porto Venere. En route here are plenty of vast open views, gardens and woodland. You also pass Case Lovara, a traditional renovated working farmhouse run by FAI, the Italian National Trust, where refreshments, meals and accommodation are on offer (www.poderecaselovara.it).

At the end of the walk, do factor in time for a well-earned swim – there's plenty of free public sand alongside the fee-paying serviced patches with umbrellas and deck chairs.



From Levanto railway station go down the stairs and follow the main road as it curves across the **Ghiararo river**. Continue straight ahead on Corso Roma, seawards. ▶ Just before the waterfront and Piazza Mazzini, branch L on Corso Italia along to a park then R under the arches of a raised road (formerly the railway) where red/white SVA waymarks appear. These lead past the Casinò Municipale and a swimming pool and on to the promenade Via

You may like to detour via the charming old town centre – but make sure you end up on the seafront afterwards to pick up the walk.



The path leaves Levanto at the waterfront arches

Gaetano Semenza overlooking the lovely bay. Not far along at some arches don't miss the signed SVA fork L up stepped Salita San Giorgio. It wastes no time climbing past elegant villas to the 13th century **castello**. Go R on the cobbled way S past houses and up into woodland. You join the road for a short stretch as far as **Hotel La Giada del Mesco** for a R turn. This path drops around a panoramic point. A gentle descent through olive groves and orchards sees you approaching **Punta Mesco**, its rugged rocky point plunging into the sea.

As the properties finish, the SVA begins rising through shady holm oak wood on a well graded stepped lane up to a marvellously panoramic stretch through flowering shrubs with stomach-dropping views over the turquoise sea and coves 250 metres below.

A curve around a side valley sees you at **Case Lovara** (255m, 1hr 40min). ◀ Now a rockier path heads uphill SE, a glorious stretch. You're soon at a junction – go R past an old tower and R again with brilliant views over Monterosso and all the way along the coast to the islands off Porto Venere. Not far on you reach the tiny church of **Sant'Antonio al Mesco** (311m, 20min).

A long-gone monastery was inhabited throughout the 14th century by hermits. It doubled as a watch-tower and there's a Second World War bunker to boot. You're high above Punta Mesco and long abandoned quarries where sandstone was once extracted to pave the streets of Monterosso.

Return to the last junction and branch R as the SVA begins its decisive downhill plunge, mostly NE on giant steps that can be knee-testing. A fair way down you tumble out onto the road near Hotel Bellevue and take the tarmac. The path soon resumes before a final bit of road past houses to an easy-to-miss fork R for the final drop past a tower house. Steps wind down overlooking a small harbour to join a concrete lane L past another tower shaded by a magnificent maritime pine. Then it's a stroll

The farm property can be visited and refreshments had.



along the seafront of **Monterosso** lined with beach huts and cafés to the **railway station** (12m, 45min).

Admiring the great view over Monterosso