

Hiking in the Italian Riviera

This tour of the Italian Riviera begins in the walled city of Lucca. Lucca has a rare combination of beautiful historic architecture, no traffic, and few tourists. We spend a fun afternoon touring the town by bicycle. The bike ride is easy, safe, and allows us to see the entire town. The next morning we make our way to the Cinque Terre; five isolated villages on the coast of the Italian Riviera. Like Lucca, cars and scooters are banned from the village centers. We stay in colorful Monterosso. Over the next few days we explore these five fishing villages and the footpaths that connect them. We have organized hikes to all five towns, but have been careful to leave extra time for swimming or just relaxing at a seaside café. Seafood lovers can savor fresh mussels, squid, and shellfish while pasta fans will delight in sampling the best pesto in Italy. On day four we travel further up the coast to Santa Margherita Ligure, gateway to the Portofino National Forest. We walk to elegant Portofino and visit Brown's Castle for spectacular views. On day five we hike to the secluded seaside abbey of San Fruttuoso. Options are available for shorter or longer hikes.

Route Rating

Moderate: 3-5 miles per day of hiking with some steep ascents/descents.

Meet / Finish

Florence / Santa Margherita Ligure

Highlights

- Bike ride on top of the ancient walls of Lucca
- Pesto making lesson with local chef
- Cinque Terre wine tasting with sommelier
- Hike to Portofino
- The secluded Abbey of San Fruttuoso
- Beautiful Mediterranean Sea views



Cinque Terre Hiking The Hikes



Day 1 Lucca

Optional 3-mile (5 km) bicycle ride

We rendezvous at our Lucca hotel and go to lunch at a nearby trattoria. Lucca is best known for its walls. These are not like the walls you see in other Italian towns. These are massive walls, some 40 feet high and 100 feet wide. The walls have become an elevated park that rings the historic center. Lucca is small and there is a lot to see. To cover ground more quickly we get city bikes. We do a lap around the walls passing cafés, gelato carts, and playgrounds. From our higher vantage point we see the center of Lucca and the green mountains that surround the town. We stop and tour a 17th century villa and gardens. Those looking to really stretch their legs can climb the 14th century stone tower for 360 degree views. We visit the Piazza dell'Anfiteatro. This oval piazza was built on the remains of a Roman amphitheater. Before dinner you will have time to explore on your own. Dinner on your own in Lucca.

charnes tours hiking and cycling in italy

Hotel

Alle Corti Degli Angeli Lucca (1 night)

This 4-star hotel has been tastefully renovated while maintaining its historic character.

www.allacortedegliangeli.it

The Ride, Day 1

We use bicycles to explore the historic center of Lucca. There will be no hills or traffic.

Wine Tasting Monterosso

We go to the Cinque Terre's oldest wine shop where a sommelier leads a guided wine tasting. Wine production is limited due to the steep hills. The small wineries make dry, aromatic whites, sparkling wines, and grappas.

Want longer or shorter hikes?

Frequent boats and trains allow you to hike as much or as little as you like. Train rides between towns take 5 minutes or less. Ferries are slower, but offer great views.

Other Questions?

Toll free 1 888 491 2760
info@charnestours.com

Day 2 Monterosso, Cinque Terre

Monterosso to Vernazza

Distance: 2.8 miles (4.5 km)

Total Ascent: 863 feet (263 mt)

After breakfast we transfer by van to the Cinque Terre. Our destination is Monterosso, the westernmost of the five villages. We regroup after lunch for our first hike to Vernazza. The hike lasts two hours and takes us up and over a scenic ridge. Your efforts will be rewarded with stunning views of the azure waters of the Mediterranean. Before dinner we go to a small family-run wine bar where a sommelier leads a guided tasting of the local wines. For dinner share a seafood lasagne or stuffed squid. Vegetarians can try the local *trenette* pasta with homemade pesto or *farinata* a chick pea *focaccia* baked in a wood oven. Dinner on your own in Monterosso.

Hotel

Hotel Margherita

Monterosso (2 nights)
Situated in the old part of Monterosso, the hotel is just steps away from the beaches, shops, and restaurants.

www.hotelmonterosso.it

The Hike. Day 2

2.8 miles (4.5 km)

Hike for 2 hours with some steep ups and downs. For a more leisurely afternoon take the train or boat and meet us in Vernazza.



Day 3 Monterosso, Cinque Terre

After breakfast we return to Vernazza by train. Today you can hike to all the remaining Cinque Terre villages or you can hike less. The choice is up to you. Trains zip between towns making it easy to get around. For a more scenic ride take a ferry between villages.

Vernazza to Corniglia

Distance: 3.5 miles (5.6 km)
Total Ascent: 968 feet (295 mt)

The hike from Vernazza to Corniglia begins with a climb up stone steps. The trail then gently rolls up and down through oak and chestnut forests. You pass tiered vineyards and olive groves clinging to the hillside. Corniglia is the smallest and quietest of the villages. It sits atop a 100-meter-high rocky promontory surrounded by vineyards. Pastel colored houses line a labyrinth of narrow alleyways.

Corniglia to Manarola

Distance: 4.4 miles (7.1 km)
Total Ascent: 1,624 feet (495 mt)

In 2011 the lower path between these towns was damaged in a landslide. Repairs have been mired in a bureaucratic morass. As with everything in Italy there is always a work around. A higher trail now zig zags up the hillside. As you hike, Corniglia pops up through the trees and vines, a reassuring and colorful speck amidst the vast green and blue. You pass through Volastra, a small hilltop town with a café for refreshments. You meander through grape vines, past steep man-made terraces, and under the little grape "monorails" before descending steeply into Manarola. To learn more about wine take a detour to the Cantina Cinque Terre. This winery is the area's largest and produces whites, sparkling wines, and grappa.

Manarola to Riomaggiore

Distance: 1.2 miles (1.9 km)
Total Ascent: 686 feet (209 mt)

Once upon a time there was a path called the *Via dell'Amore* that connected Manarola and Riomaggiore. The path was short, paved, and easy. Today you can walk half the path, starting in Riomaggiore. More of a stroll than a hike, the path was cut into the sheer cliff during construction of the train tunnel. Manarola and Riomaggiore are close, but separated by a big hill. The trail that connects them heads over the steep ridge with breathtaking views of the sea and the terraced vineyards.

The Hikes, Day 3

Vernazza to Corniglia

3.5 miles (5.6 km)

One of the prettiest hikes in the Cinque Terre with a steep uphill and a steep downhill. Spectacular sea views.

Corniglia to Manarola

4.4 miles (7.1 km)

Hike through terraced vineyards and olive groves. See the grapes up close. Visit the town of Volastra.

Manarola to Riomaggiore

1.2 mile (1.9 km)

Short but steep. This hike is either going up or down while offering beautiful views of the Ligurian Sea.

Pesto Class and Dinner Monterosso

At the end of the day we can speed back to our Monterosso hotel by train or take the scenic ride on the slower ferry. Tonight the Pasini family hosts us for a pesto-making class and private dinner. Using local ingredients Felicità Pasini prepares traditional pesto while explaining the history of this Ligurian specialty. Dinner includes fresh seafood and homemade pesto lasagna. Dinner together after the pesto class (included in tour).



Day 4 Santa Margherita Ligure (Portofino)

Santa Margherita Ligure to Portofino

Distance: 4 miles (6.5 km)

Ascent: 587 feet (179 mt)

After two and a half days in the Cinque Terre we move west to elegant Santa Margherita Ligure. A one-hour van ride takes us to this jewel of the Italian Riviera. Santa Margherita Ligure occupies a beautiful position on the Gulf of Tigullio. Palm trees and colorful flowerbeds line the scenic seaside promenade. A harbor filled with sailboats and a sandy beach complete the inviting seashore. Today we hike three hours to chic Portofino. This rocky, rugged promontory offers one of the most attractive landscapes of the Italian Riviera. In Portofino we visit the *Castello Brown*, a spectacular 15th century castle. The castle offers the best views of colorful Portofino. We return to Santa Margherita Ligure by boat (or bus on the rare occasions when the sea is too rough). Dinner on your own in Santa Margherita Ligure.

Hotel

Hotel Minerva

Santa Margherita Ligure
(2 nights)

Located on a quiet street close to the marina, the Hotel Minerva offers clean, comfortable, air-conditioned rooms. The Minerva has a beautiful garden where you can eat al-fresco and a roof-top terrace with sea views.

www.hminerva.it

The Hike, Day 4

Hike 3 hours from Santa Margherita to Portofino. We hike uphill past olive groves and gardens while enjoying some of the best views of the Italian Riviera.

Day 5 Santa Margherita Ligure (Portofino)

Portofino to San Fruttuoso

Distance: 3.9 miles (6.3 kilometers)

Ascent: 1,102 feet (336 mt)

Bring your bathing suit today for a dip in San Fruttuoso. A short boat ride takes us to Portofino for the start of our hike in the Portofino National Forest. Leaving Portofino the path climbs quickly past stately villas. Soon olive groves and vineyards give way to a thick emerald green forest. Needles from marine pines crunch underfoot. After one hour we stop at a spring where fresh water pools below the footpath. Our destination is the secluded abbey of San Fruttuoso, accessible only by foot or boat. We enjoy a leisurely seafood lunch at a seaside table. Italians know the abbey for its famous *Jesu Sott'Acqua*, an underwater statue of Jesus with his arms raised up toward the surface of the sea. You can see a copy of the statue inside the church. After lunch tour the abbey or just hang out on the beach. Boat back to Santa Margherita Ligure. Dinner on your own in Santa Margherita Ligure.

The Hike, Day 5

We have saved the best hike for last. Hike through quiet emerald forests. Every turn offers a better view of the crystal clear Mediterranean sea. Swim at a remote beach and eat al fresco by the sea.

Other Questions?

Toll free 1 888 491 2760
info@charnestours.com





Day 6 Hiking Tour Ends

Your walking tour ends in Santa Margherita Ligure. After breakfast you check out of the hotel and continue your travels. It is a ten-minute walk to the train station or a quick taxi ride.

DEPARTURE ON LAST DAY OF TOUR

Santa Margherita Ligure is along a major east/west train line. Your guide will be happy to help you with your train tickets and taxis. For information on Italian trains see www.trenitalia.it.

Travel times to major Italian cities are:

Santa Margherita Ligure to Florence: 3 hours
Santa Margherita Ligure to Milan: 2 hours 45 minutes
Santa Margherita Ligure to Rome: 5 hours 20 minutes
Santa Margherita Ligure to Venice: 5 hours 20 minutes

Our dates don't work?

Put a group of four or more together and we can schedule a guided tour whenever you want.

Other Questions?

Toll free 1 888 491 2760
info@charnestours.com