

CINQUE TERRE TRAVEL GUIDE – THE PERFECT ITALIAN COASTAL BREAK



Recently, my husband and I took a long weekend break to Cinque Terre. I had been to Amalfi Coast a few years ago and wanted to compare the two. I also wanted a romantic getaway with my husband! The Cinque Terre ended up being one of the most beautiful and relaxing place I have ever been. I was nervous that it would be overrun with tourists that would ruin the relaxing vibe. It was overrun with tourists, but only during the day. The mornings and evenings were so blissful. I think everyone that enjoys seeing beautiful places should put Cinque Terre on their bucket list.

SHOULD I VISIT CINQUE TERRE?

I think visiting just to check it off a list is not the best idea. It is so gorgeous, but the best part about it is enjoying it. This is definitely one of my favorite places I have ever been to, but it wasn't until I started enjoying it and stopped running around taking pictures that I was drawn in. Cinque Terre is so beautiful, it really is more beautiful than you can imagine – think dramatic coastlines, colourful villages, nature all around with walking trails in between each of the five villages, relaxing seaside spots for a stroll or a drink, amazing regional Italian food and wine, and evenings eating by the water with the sound of the waves crashing.

Because Cinque Terre is in the North of Italy, it is a great relaxing stop to add onto your Italian vacation – particularly if you are already going to Rome, Florence, Venice, **Lake Como**, or **Tuscany**. All of these cities together would make the *perfect* Italian vacation. If you want to expand your itinerary beyond Cinque Terre, I would suggest something in the south of France like the **French Riviera** or **Provence**.



HOW DO I CHOOSE BETWEEN CINQUE TERRE AND AMALFI COAST?

A lot of people ask me this now that I've seen both areas ([check out my guide to Amalfi Coast here](#)), so I thought I would clarify. First, these two areas are very far from each other in Italy, so I wouldn't recommend trying to squeeze both into one trip.

Cinque Terre and Amalfi Coast are both very tourist-heavy and crowded. Cruise ships can go to either location causing throngs of people to show up during the day. So don't think that one is more under-the-radar than the other.



Amalfi Coast is the more high-end of the two. In Positano, you will find Louis Vuitton and Missoni stores, for example. You will not find anything name-brand like that in Cinque Terre. In Positano, you can go to dinner in designer digs and wedges whereas in Cinque Terre the dress code is much more laid back.

Amalfi Coast is built a little more vertically than Cinque Terre which can make it more breathtaking from the ocean.

Amalfi Coast is larger than Cinque Terre. The towns there are larger volume wise. That makes it easier to do more. But you are restricted to your town a little more than in Cinque Terre. In Cinque Terre you can travel from one town to the other in 5 minutes.

All in all, I think Amalfi Coast is best for a luxury getaway with great shopping, a Capri side trip, boujee meals, and some fun bars to dance the night away at. Cinque Terre is best for a relaxing vacation. It also makes so much more sense to go to Cinque Terre if you are doing an Italian trip because it is closer to most of the cities in Italy that people like to visit (Rome, Florence, Venice, Tuscany, Lake Como). The shopping is restricted to small markets and souvenir shops, the restaurants are a little less formal, and the nightlife is listening to live music on the square in Vernazza once a week. They're both so magical and beautiful, and truly your best option is to see both in your lifetime!!

WHAT TIME OF YEAR SHOULD I VISIT CINQUE TERRE?

We went in peak, peak tourist season (August) and next time I would definitely try the shoulder months. Maybe May, June, or September. July might even be better. I think the best part was the relaxing on or in the water, so I would definitely come during the late May – early October window where it's not too cold.

HOW DO I GET TO CINQUE TERRE?

Disclaimer: I took super detailed notes about how to get to Cinque Terre from Genoa since that is where we flew in and out of. Unfortunately, we got stuck in Genoa on the way home because the bridge collapsed! I am assuming the infrastructure in Genoa will take a while to recover, so I would not recommend coming from Genoa. Try Pisa or Milan.

Coming from the US, you would probably be tacking this on to other Italian destinations. In that case, you would be arriving via train as there is no airport in Cinque Terre. You can buy your train tickets online if you know exactly when you want to go at **Trenitalia**, or wait until you get to the train station and purchase there. The infrastructure in Italy is pretty old, including the trains (hence the bridge collapse..... too soon?). If you choose to buy your tickets at the station, go to the ticket counter or the automated machines – type in your destination (your village you are staying in), and see your options. For us, the quickest option was sold out but I hadn't wanted to purchase our tickets ahead of time in case our flight was delayed. Sit on the right side of the train for views of the ocean!! Also note that the trains are very old and there is no WiFi (at least from Genoa this was the case).

The below map is *not* to scale, but it shows the distance from each Italian city to Monterosso via train.



IS THERE A LANGUAGE BARRIER IN CINQUE TERRE?

Most everyone spoke English, but I do have to say (hopefully no one gets upset at me for this one), the Italians are not super nice or helpful. If you ask for help, it is rare to actually get help. They all seem to be rolling their eyes at the American tourists and smiling does not help. Definitely know a few key words because this does seem to lift their grumpy moods a tad.

WHERE SHOULD I STAY IN CINQUE TERRE?

There are so many options! Cinque Terre means 5 villages which means you have 5 villages to choose from. We stayed in Vernazza at the best Airbnb I've ever stayed in – our host built the complex by hand, was always there to lend some advice and a laugh (an exception to everyone else we met), and the prices were very reasonable. Book it [straight through his website](#) for a cheaper price for you and him. We came to the Cinque Terre to do hikes and relax by the water. There are hiking trails between each of the 5 villages, with the 2 most famous ones being between Corniglia and Vernazza and Vernazza and Monterosso. The other 2 hikes were actually closed when we got there. Vernazza ended up being the perfect place for us since we could hike both hikes in the morning without catching a train! That being said, all of the villages were just so freaking cute. The only one I would not recommend is Monterosso because it is the least cute. Corniglia is also very small and doesn't have very much beach access, so maybe not that one either.

HOW DO I GET AROUND CINQUE TERRE?

By train, ferry, or hiking. The train is €4 for each ride, the ferry is €8-€12 for each ride, and the hiking day pass is €7. The ticket machines at the train stations are incredibly slow, so factor that in when you are catching a train. The timetables are very unreliable as well. We truly never knew when the train was coming. Try to do a ferry trip at least once though!

HOW MANY DAYS SHOULD I SPEND IN CINQUE TERRE?

Definitely 2 full days to relax – you probably know by now that I always recommend 3 nights in relaxing destinations. I really don't think Cinque Terre is worth coming to unless you have 3 nights here!!

WHAT IS THERE TO DO IN CINQUE TERRE?

Oh my gosh so much. Where to begin.

HIKING

So the hiking routes are varied and numerous in Cinque Terre, but the main semi-chill, touristy hike is easy to figure out. Unless you're like a super serious hiker, these are great options. We got our fix which was a sweaty, cardio pumping, jaw-dropping-view hike along the water. That was enough for us.

I think only the stretch from Monterosso to Corniglia (with Vernazza in between) will be open for the near future. With 2 full days, that's perfect – 1 hike a day!! These hikes are very uphill and can get very hot – I would for sure 1000% wear tennis shoes (hiking shoes are overkill) and bring some water. My husband and I packed backpacks with a bathing suit, sandals, towel, water, and cover-up each morning before our hike since we had every intention of lounging at the nearest watering hole we found. Each hike is just about an hour – I think the one from monterosso to vernazza was about 90 minutes.

The prettiest parts of the hikes are approaching Vernazza from Monterosso and approaching Vernazza from Corniglia. Sorry, Vernazza is just that cute. Since we were doing the opposite and hiking away from Vernazza, we just made sure to turn around and take pictures and soak in the beauty from above.

Side note: on the way from Vernazza to Corniglia (and vice versa) you'll pass a little bar in a village along the way with a pretty patio and enticing drinks. Just a heads up.





RELAXING

I mean come on – this is seriously the beauty of the Cinque Terre. Relaxing hard. Every village has it's own special area for relaxing and it's own special area for exploring. It's actually quite simple. There's usually one road in the village with all the shops and restaurants that leads down to the water where said relaxation takes place...

EXPLORING

VERNAZZA

I'll start with the town I'm most familiar with since we stayed here. We got to know it quite intimately. It's also the most simple town with literally one street that starts at the train station and heads down to the sea. There is a small square with some restaurants and bars that looks out over the beach and the ocean. There are 3 hilltop restaurants to the left if you are looking at the water. And that's vernazza. If you are staying in vernazza, I highly recommend just bringing a bottle of wine and some plastic cups around the water and just relaxing on the rocks. We spent our last night with a bottle of wine watching the sunset out on the rocks, and I don't think I can recall a more blissful point in my life.







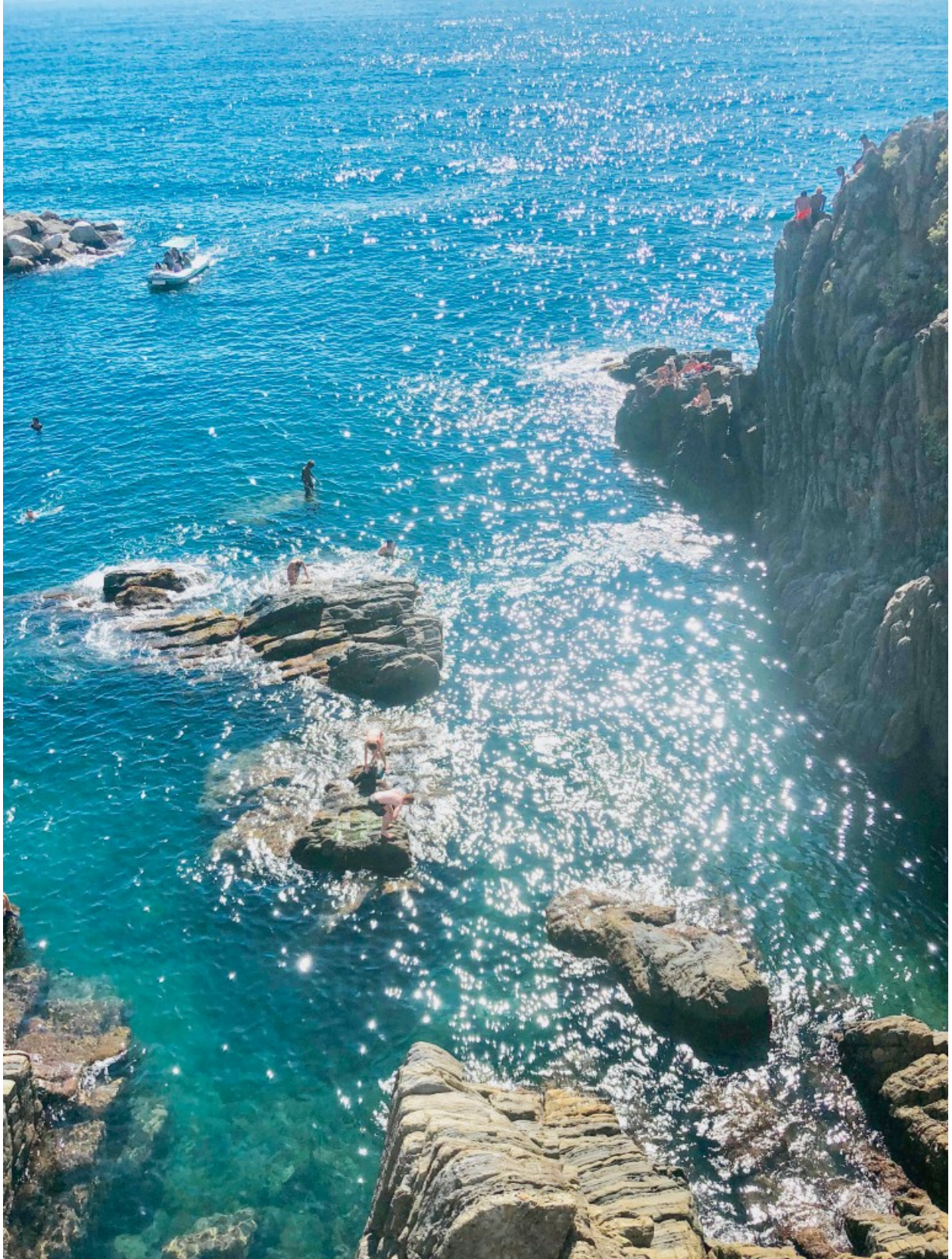
RIOMAGGIORE

After our hike to Monterosso and time on the beach, we took the ferry to Riomaggiore so we could get a view of all the villages from the water. And oh my gosh did we love this village. Our favorite spot on the whole coast was a little wine shop here called a Piè de Mà because it was oh so beautiful and oh so unpretentious!! No reservations, no seated tables – just come in, take a seat, and order at the bar. We were so obsessed that we tried to come back to this village our last day just to come here but discovered that it's closed on Mondays – major FYI!!

The beach area here is very much just rocks, pictured. We didn't partake though I very much wanted to.
Next time.







MANAROLA

Manarola is definitely one of the most beautiful of the villages. For that reason, it also gets very crowded. While taking the picture of the village below, we passed probably 30 different girls getting styled shots on the walkway of them with the village behind them, eye roll.

My husband and I spent our day on the rocks here just relaxing and jumping in the water. It was the best. Then we ran up to take this shot and then ran away. We were not feeling the crowds that day.





CORNIGLIA

We admittedly didn't stay long in Corniglia, but it's really freaking cute. There's supposed to be a secret beach here too that is dreamy – google it if you are interested. After your hike, stop for a bite to eat and a drink and admire the views.

Be warned!! The walk from the train station to the city is literally insane. Corniglia is up in the hills so you take at least 10 flights of very steep stairs to get there. I would absolutely not recommend training to Corniglia because of this. Hiking there and walking down the flights of stairs to the train station? No problem.

Another note: we had read about a secret beach by the Corniglia train station. We took about 30 minutes trying to find it through google maps and random articles. When we finally did, I can report that it wasn't that cool. I wouldn't recommend seeking it out.



BEACHES MONTEROSSO

I am *such* a sucker for umbrellas on a beach, so I couldn't quite get enough of Monterosso's coastline. Most of the shops and restaurants are along the coast as well. We didn't venture into the streets of Monterosso. It's definitely the largest of the five and doesn't hold quite the same charm.

But the beach is great. I wrote down a few helpful tips. First, when we got there at the end of our hike at 10:10, every single beach umbrella grouping guy said they were completely sold out except for one. Within 15 minutes after we got our umbrella on the back row, the sign went up saying they were sold out too. Apparently everyone comes the evening before to reserve their umbrella for the next day. So if you want to lay on the beach in a beach chair, come super early or the evening before!

When you are looking at the water, know that the left side of the beach (closer to Vernazza) is very rocky and difficult to walk on bare footed. The right side is sandy and easy to walk on (unless the sand is too hot).

On the beach there are two walk-up bars to get cocktails. One is a little shack that faces the sand that you can't miss and one is a beach bar close to the pier called Beach Bar Stella Marina – this is where we got our umbrellas.





WHERE DO I EAT IN CINQUE TERRE?

There are 3 things you must eat in Cinque Terre if you want to have the full local experience.

1. Fried seafood in a cone
2. Pesto pasta
3. Focaccia, ideally pesto.

You can find all three of these in any of the towns for any meal, but here were my favorites of the trip.

1. Eat it for a snack. Best in Riomaggiore at Il Pescato Cucinato. Also a long line at this place in Monterosso called Il Bocconcino that we passed up because we were running late for the ferry.
2. Eat it for dinner. Best was at Gianni Franzi in the square at Vernazza. Handmade pasta with so-fresh pesto sauce.
3. Eat it for a snack/lunch. Best was at Fornaio di Monterosso in Monterosso. Seriously the best looking and tasting focaccia ever. Try to score it straight out of the oven and then take it back to your beach chair and indulge.

EATING IN VERNAZZA

DINNERS

We ate all our dinners in Vernazza because we were obsessed with it. We did the research for you to figure out where NOT to eat mostly as 2 of the 3 places we would not recommend.

Trattoria Da Sandro – would not recommend. Their walnut pasta intrigued me as I love nut-based sauces in Mexican cuisine so much. No. This was literally pasta covered in cream and walnuts. Unless you're literally obsessed with the taste of raw walnuts, this was not yummy.

Ristorante Vulnetia – would not recommend. Sweet Giuliano recommended this place. Service was poor and we were like “oh that's standard Italian so this place must be so local and delicious”. Our meal was just a little lackluster and needed more salt. If a chef can't master the one rule of cooking which is seasoning food correctly, it's a hard pass for me.

Gianni Franzi – we absolutely loved this place. Our food and everything. We also got there right when it opened to get a table by the water. I would recommend this or make a reservation. I got the pesto pasta and my husband got the pasta with mussels.

Rooftop restaurants – we were going for a cheaper, less glitzy vibe this trip so we passed on these. They are supposed to be delicious and beautiful though.

BREAKFAST / LUNCH / DRINKS / GELATO

Lunch Box – this place is super American but we loved it for their friendly servers, juices (for when your carb intake is at the max), and eggs. Great place for breakfast.

Batti Batti – mediocre focaccia when we went

All other breakfast spots – they're okay to grab a coffee and pastry, nothing special

Ananasso Bar – perfect place to grab a drink and hang out by the water

Gelateria Vernazza – oh my gosh this place was delicious. Best gelato I've ever had. They don't allow samples, but I think anything is good.

OTHER VILLAGE'S RESTAURANTS

Here are some places we didn't eat at but had recommendations for. So if you are staying in these villages, try these out.

Rio Bistrot – Riomaggiore – High-end Italian. They have 2 seated dinner times. Recommended by a friend and New York Times.

Fuori Rotta Wine Bar – Riomaggiore – recommended by a friend and several blogs

Nessum Dorma – Manarola – Snacks and drinks place with a view of the whole village (pictured view below). Looked a little touristy but it was midday. It is probably very nice in the evening when the cruise ship crowds have cleared out.

Il Porticciolo – Manarola – dinner restaurant recommended by several blogs

Trattoria dal Billy – Manarola – high end seafood restaurant recommended everywhere

5Terre Sorbetteria – Manarola – if you are either gluten or dairy free, this shop only sells gelato without gluten or dairy!

A Cantina da Mananan – Corniglia – cozy Italian restaurant with great online reviews

La Scuna Wine & Beer – Corniglia – we actually did stop here after our hike to get drinks. You then walk to their patio just down the road to enjoy the views and drinks.

Ristorante Miky + Cantina di Miky – two different concepts for lunch or dinner that are supposed to be delicious. Our sweaty hiker clothes or cover up did not seem nice enough to eat here. The menu looked great though.

IS THERE A PLACE TO GO OUT IN CINQUE TERRE?

I did not find any beachy clubs while I was here. My guess is that Monterosso might have some beach-side dancing spots, but I didn't care enough to go check it out. In Vernazza, they had a schedule of bands in the square. We luckily had a performance on our first night there that was so fun!

WHAT SHOULD I PACK FOR CINQUE TERRE?

Going to Cinque Terre is a little different than most beach destinations because of the hiking. I absolutely never bring a backpack with me, but here it was a must to hold my towel and cover up. Hoisting a beach bag on my shoulder would've been a little annoying because the hikes were not a stroll in the park! So I would recommend a backpack to hold your things. And tennis shoes!

Remember that everywhere is cash only. Literally everywhere. I would get out €100 per person per day at the ATM. They had them in every village. Make sure you have your debit card!

Like I mentioned in my comparison to Amalfi Coast, the dress code is very casual here. I had picked some kind of boujee outfits from my experience in Amalfi but opted for a cute, casual sundress or nice shorts and a casual top at night instead. And always sandals. It's way too steep for wedges.

Bring a light sweater or wrap for night because it does get a little chillier.

HONESTLY, HOW MUCH DID YOU SPEND IN CINQUE TERRE?

3 nights

Total – \$723 (\$1,446 for 2 people)

Flight – \$167 (from London; you wouldn't have this if you were tacking it on to other Italian destinations)

Accommodation – \$235

Transportation – \$70

Food – \$220

Entertainment – \$33

MY PERFECT 3 DAY CINQUE TERRE ITINERARY

DAY 1

Get in, check in, and find somewhere to get a drink. In Vernazza, go to Ananasso Bar. In Riomaggiore, go to A Pie da M^a. If you're in Manarola, go to Nessum Dorma. In Corniglia, go to Bar Terza Terra or La Scuna. In Monterosso, I'm not sure. Somewhere with a view.

Have a delicious dinner in whatever village you are in at one of the above mentioned place. Make sure to watch the sunset. Drinking wine on the rocks is a bonus.

Side note: if your plans involve relaxing on the beach in Monterosso tomorrow, head there to reserve an umbrella.

DAY 2

Get up and hike one of the routes after grabbing a snack and coffee in town. Let's do my route and say Monterosso. Relax as long as you want – no rush. Grab foccacia at Fornaio di Monterosso for lunch.

(If you are hiking to Vernazza from Monterosso because you are staying in Monterosso, there is a nice beach in Vernazza as well to relax at. You can grab Gelato at Gelateria Vernazza, juice at Lunch Box, or foccacia at Batti Batti.)

Take the ferry to Riomaggiore. Wander the town, get a fried seafood cone if you're hungry, and head to the wine bar. If you're not ready to be done with the water, then hang out with the locals by the water on the rocks.

Head home and shower and have dinner in your village. Or any village!

DAY 3

Do the other hike. Let's assume it's to Corniglia. Hang out here exploring the village for as long as you want.

Head to Manarola. Soak in all of the views from the walk to Nessum Dorma. Sit down by the rocks and cliffs if you want some beach time.

You've now seen all of the villages!! Your afternoon is now free – go back and visit your favorite spot. Please don't forget to have some wine in plastic cups watching the sunset in some beautiful place at some point one of these days.