

## CINQUE TERRE, ITALY

May 7-9

For those of you not familiar with Cinque Terre, it's a small region on the west coast of Italy, about half-way between Genoa and Pisa, composed of five villages (hence "Cinque") connected by footpaths. From north to south the villages are: Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore. The surrounding hills are lined with terraced vineyards and lush vegetation and fall sharply into the turquoise water below. This is certainly not a destination undiscovered by tourists (and in particular French tourists) but for good reason, as the scenery is spectacular.

Our main goal for this trip was to do as much hiking as possible (we're in training for Corsica this summer!) and of course see the beautiful Italian villages of Cinque Terre and indulge in a bit of Italian cuisine. We booked quite last minute, so we didn't have all options available to us. Overall, our itinerary still worked just fine, but of course I'll let you know what I might do differently the next time.

Early May seemed to be a perfect time to visit. I've heard horror stories of human traffic jams when 1000s of people descend on these small villages and try to make their way from one to the next on the footpaths carved into the seaside ledges. A friend told me that even two weeks before over the Easter holiday, the crowds were unbearable. I would avoid long weekend and July & August. If your objective is to hike and not necessarily sip wine outdoors on a terrace while working on your tan (which is also a great thing to do in Cinque Terre), then it may even be wise to visit in the true off season.

In total, we spent about €50 per person (excluding food), which includes flights, the rental car, gas (€62), tolls (almost €50), train tickets within Cinque Terre (only €1.80 each), the Cinque Terre pass (€12 for a 2-day weekend pass—required to walk from village to village), parking in Riomaggiore both days (€9 for the full day) and two nights hotel (with two people sharing a double room).

Date	To	Flight/Hotel/Car Details	Cost	Comments
Sat, March 19	Milan Malpensa, drive to Riomaggiore, train to Monterosso, hike Cinque Terre Blue Trail, night in La Spezia  We looked into flights to Pisa and Genoa, which are closer to Cinque Terre, but the flight times and the prices weren't quite right. Malpensa is about a 3-hour drive from Cinque Terre, and it's a nice ride, through some beautiful Tuscan and Ligurian countryside. This whole trip could be done without a car with a bit more time or luck in terms of train schedules. If I flew into Genoa, which has direct trains to Cinque Terre, I would skip the car.	RER B (6h41 from Châtelet)  Easyjet flight 2782 8:30-10:00am Check in 06:30-07:50 Charles de Gaulle (Terminal 2B) To Milan Malpensa (Terminal 2)  <i>Rental car:</i> Avis Europe Milano Malpensa Aeroporto Terminal 1 (10am) Ferno (Varese) 21010 +39 02 5858481 Reservation through CarTrawler Phone no +353 23 8883011  Avis made us pick up in terminal 1, which added about 15 minutes to our pick-up and drop-off—still worth it if the price is significantly better, but if there's not a huge price difference, book a car with pick-up in the terminal you are arriving at.  <i>Hotel:</i> Hotel Nella Address Via Genova 591 La Spezia, 19134 Phone +390187711221 <a href="mailto:direzione@hotelnella.com">direzione@hotelnella.com</a> Hotel Nella was nothing special, but clean, quiet and inexpensive and offered a free buffet breakfast. We stayed in La Spezia only because we booked last minute and most places in Cinque Terre itself require advance booking or just showing up without a reservation. I would stay in Riomaggiore or Levanto the next time. It's worth thinking about your exact hiking plans before booked a hotel. We ended up parking in Riomaggiore both days so we could take the train north and hike back to the car. Riomaggiore would have been a good place for us to stay. But if you want to spend more time in each town and hike only a couple of hours each day, you could stay in one of the middle towns (perhaps Corniglia or Vernazza, though beware as Vernazza can be ridiculously overrun with tourists!)	€344.11 total 2 people (flight)  €3.15 total (car)  €75 total (hotel)	<i>Dinner</i> (21h): L'Osteria della Corte Via Napoli 86 19122 La Spezia Tel.: 0187 715210 <a href="mailto:info@osteriadellacorte.com">info@osteriadellacorte.com</a>  The plan was to do the Blue Trail from village to village (or Trail #2), the one everyone does (and for good reason), on Saturday. Then we'd hike the High Trail (Trail #1) on Sunday, which has spectacular views only sporadically but is much less crowded (we perhaps came across 20 people all day) and nice shade much of the way for those hot days.  On Saturday we drove to Riomaggiore, took the train to Monterosso (about 2 or 3 times per hour and only about 15 minutes' ride) and hiked back towards Riomaggiore. The guide books suggest hiking from north to south. There's no reason you couldn't do the opposite (if you are sure to look behind you once in a while for the views, especially the spectacular and often-photographed view of Vernazza from the north), but north to south gives you some more gradual uphill so it's a bit easier. We did have to take the 4-minute train ride between Corniglia and Manarola, as that section of the Blue Trail is closed until November 2011. Guide books estimate about 5 hours to complete the full hike, which is probably fairly accurate if you are not an experienced hiker, you stop for photos once in a while. If you are a rather speedy and experienced hiker and there aren't too many other people on the trail, it should be doable in 3 ½ hours plus whatever time you take to visit each town. And naturally, I recommend stopping off at least once for gelato! If you can only do one leg of the hike, Monterosso to Vernazza is probably the most breathtaking segment. After that I'd say Vernazza to Corniglia. Manarola to Riomaggiore is paved most of the way and relatively flat for those who aren't hikers.  Dinner at L'Osteria della Corte was quite good if you are in the mood for something a bit fancier and perhaps even to try items that you would not find on just any menu. The service is friendly, the decor is charming and there is a huge terrace out back for warmer nights.

Sun, March 20	Drive to <del>Portovenere</del> <b>Riomaggiore</b> , Train to Levanto, Hike Cinque Terre High Trail back to <del>Portovenere</del> <b>Riomaggiore</b> , night near Malpensa	<p><i>Hotel: Aer Hotel</i> Via Per Gallarate, 35 Oleggio, 28047 +390321960253 info@aerhotelmalpensa.com</p> <p>The Aer Hotel is quite comfortable and inexpensive. Parking is free and you are only about 15 minutes' drive from the airport.</p> <p>We had dinner with a good friend in Milan at the <b>Cantina della Vetra</b> (<a href="http://www.cantinadellavetra.it">www.cantinadellavetra.it</a>) which I could not recommend more highly. The service is extremely friendly, the setting you could perhaps describe as modern rustic, with huge windows that make for good people-watching, and the food is absolutely mouthwatering. Three of us had a glass of champagne each then shared 2 bottles of wine, 3 appetizers, 3 first courses, 2 second courses, 1 dessert and 1 calvados and paid €50 each. I will definitely eat at Cantina della Vetra next time I am in Milan and would even consider making a trip just to go back!</p>	€59 total (hotel)	<p>We spent a fair bit of time debating the best plan for Sunday from a logistical perspective. Our original idea was to park in Portovenere, take the train to Levanto, and walk back. But there is no train in Portovenere and bus service on a Sunday morning was not assured. Levanto to Portovenere is also a 12-hour walk. We estimated that we would do it in less, but it would still have been difficult to arrive in Milan for dinner. It worked well in the end to park in Riomaggiore as we had done the first day (the parking attendants weren't there at 7:45am when we left the car, but we left a note on our ticket stub from the day before saying that we would be back to pay at the end of the day and that worked fine). We then took the train just 23 minutes to Levanto (be sure to check the train schedule in advance), walked to the start of the High Trail that's just past the big white house with blue shutters on the beach (to the left if you walk from the train station to the beach and are facing the beach), and hiked about 7 ½ hours to Riomaggiore. The first segment (Levanto to Colla di Gritto) is quite beautiful, with spectacular views of the water and towns below. Then there's an annoying hour-long stretch on the road. Then the rest is on a quiet trail and mostly wooded. Above each of the five villages there's a trail down. We took the "01" trail down to Riomaggiore, which was not too well groomed in the first half, but has amazing views in the last segment. You could do this hike backwards, but as a fairly experienced hiker I can say without a doubt that I would not have wanted to hike up that trail from Riomaggiore—100s of stone steps straight up!</p>
Mon, March 21	Fly back to Paris	<p>Car Return: Malpensa Terminal 1</p> <p>Easyjet flight 2779 6:30-8:00am Check in 4:30-5:50 Milan Malpensa (Terminal 2) To Charles de Gaulle (Terminal 2B)</p>	--	<p>An early morning, but worth it to have had the wonderful dinner the night before!</p>

Here are some other websites that might be helpful in planning which trails to hike:

- <http://www.italyheaven.co.uk/liguria/cinquetterrewalking.html>
- <http://www.cinquetterrehotels.com/en/sentieri.php>
- <http://www.italylogue.com/featured-articles/hiking-guide-to-the-cinque-terre.html>
- [http://www.hotelpasquale.it/en/5\\_terre/sentieri.asp](http://www.hotelpasquale.it/en/5_terre/sentieri.asp)