

An aerial photograph of a coastal town built on a cliffside overlooking a beach. The beach is crowded with people and orange umbrellas. A large, dark rock formation juts out into the turquoise water on the left. The background shows lush green hills under a bright sky.

A taste of the Italian Riviera

*Vibrant Hutt Editor Leigh Sutton
visited the magical Cinque Terre
on the Italian Riviera in May.*

Looking down on the beach front at Monterosso.



Vernazza, the only village with a small harbour.

Tall vividly pastel coloured houses huddled together and defiantly clinging to jagged vertical cliffs overlooking the sparkling blue Mediterranean sea, enchanting beaches among rocks, a plethora of local crafts, delicious seafood and wine ...

The Cinque Terre or “The Five Lands” is made up of five small, picturesque villages on a ruggedly beautiful stretch of coast on the Italian Riviera, to the west of the city of La Spezia. The coastline, the five villages and the surrounding hillsides are all part of the Cinque Terre National Park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Part of the charm of The Cinque Terre is undoubtedly the lack of visible “modern” development. Paths, trains and boats connect the villages of Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore with cars unable to reach them from the outside. Corniglia and Manarola in particular appear to have defied both gravity and time with the

life of locals only marginally influenced by tourism. Fishing boats are parked on steep village streets and washing simply flung out windows to dry.

The fact Corniglia can only be reached by climbing a long, steep flight of steps accounts for it being the most unspoilt. But spurning the loo at a café there because despite amenities like hot water and toilet paper it was essentially a hole in the ground affair proved unwise. I opted instead to wait for the facilities at Vernazza railway station. There I discovered a long queue of both men and women all waiting to avail themselves of the one unisex hole in the ground lacking both loo paper and hot water! The experience

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The walkway to Manarola.



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Manarola, precariously perched on a rocky spur overhanging the sea and is characterised by its colourful houses.



Manarola street scene.

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certainly helped me to more fully enjoy our delightfully modern hotel in Monterosso. Reminiscence of Pahia in our own beautiful Bay Of Islands, Monterosso is the village with the best beaches, the most wine shops, craft shops, hotels and restaurants.

One of the best ways to explore The Cinque Terre is to walk the network of paths connecting the villages. Heavy rainfall before our arrival had caused landslides closing the paths between Monterosso, Vernazza and Corniglia so we caught the train to the southern most village of Riomaggiore and worked our way backwards from there.

The path from Riomaggiore to Manarola is called the Via dell'Amore (Love Walk) and with the temperature hovering around 20 to 22 degrees and a busker paving the way with Italian love songs it proved a pretty easy and pleasant stroll.

The trail from Manarola to Corniglia was more challenging but while my companion hung on to the cliff sides for dear life I did not find it at all scary and I have no head for heights. At the path's end you can only reach Corniglia, which is built on a steep headland, by climbing up staircase of 380 plus steps. Fortunately I was able to "refresh" myself before starting the climb with some retail therapy – yes there on the narrow rocky path was a man selling wonderfully original necklaces. The note from my travel diary reads "...Bought two necklaces on way to Corniglia. In fact shopped whole day". My kind of holiday!

We travelled from Corniglia to Vernazza and home to Monterosso by local train. Our Cinque Terre Card purchased at the beginning of the day for about eight Euros



Monterosso has the most restaurants of all the Cinque Terre Villages.

allowed us unlimited daily train travel and access to the path network. With villages only minutes away from each other by train there is ample time to take in the sights and, of course, shop!

Proceeds from the sale of cards are directed toward the recovery and maintenance of the territory in order to prevent its widespread hydro-geological breakdown. Proceeds are also used to provide transport and information services, and to develop the typical products of the Cinque Terre.

Leigh's travel itinerary and arrangements were handled by Adventure Travel, Wellington.



On the Via dell'Amore (Love Walk) between Riomaggiore and Manarola lovers can seal their love for ever – first with a kiss and then by fixing a padlock to the fence surround.

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