

Portofino and the Italian Riviera self-guided walk

\$1740 per person b&b or \$1990 with dinners included*

Portofino extra night option \$150 b&b

***5% discount when 4 people or more book and deposit together**

Portofino is the star turn of the Italian Riviera, a beautifully preserved fishing village tucked into a perfect bay but it is only one of the highlights of this fascinating stretch of coastline that sits between Genoa and the Cinque Terre.

The tour starts in Camogli on the other side of the promontory, another former fishing village which was described by Charles Dickens as 'the feistiest, roughest, most piratical little place I've visited'. It's a little more couth these days but has lost none of its nautical charm. The first two walks of the tour take you through the national park that separates the Camogli and Portofino following a series of well-marked trails through pine and oak forests above spectacular coastline with some of the most beautiful views in northern Italy. Leaving the Portofino peninsula on the third day you pick up a pilgrim of ancient paths through the foothills that wrap around behind the Gulf of Tugullio, dropping down to the lively coastal towns along the way. The tour finishes at the end of the gulf at the Bay of Silence in Sestri Levante, a delightful summer resort on the Isola Peninsula.

The walks:

This walk picks up the pilgrim trails that ran above the Liguria coast, climbing up into the forested hills each before dipping down to the bustling coastal towns in the evening, detouring into the beautiful Portofino National Park at the beginning. The trails follow a combination of ancient paved paths and well-marked walking trails. There are some steep climbs and both the last two days walks are over 15 kms, however, in both cases it is possible to break the walks and take a local train to the hotel.

The accommodation:

You'll be staying in a combination of very good, centrally located three and four star hotels, in comfortable rooms with generous breakfasts, en suite bathrooms and sea views.

The food

Ligurians like to use their own trusted products which come from the 350 kilometres of coastline with it rough, mountainous hinterland or is fished out of their own waters. It is an austere but delicious style of cooking that has produced such specialities as pesto sauce and foccaccia. Even the wines, grown with great effort on the steep, rocky terraces seems to have been invented in Liguria, and suits the local food perfectly.

Dinners are not included in the standard tour, however, if you select the 'Dinners option' (which we recommend) this will include 3 course meals alla carte (ie free choice) in some of the coast's finest restaurants. The dinner option also means you'll have a guaranteed booking each night.

What's included:

- Five nights' accommodation
- All breakfasts and dinners
- Reading lists and historical and cultural notes
- Maps and detailed walking instructions
- Daily transfers of baggage between hotels
- 24 hour back-up from local operations manager

Portofino and the Italian Riviera Itinerary

Day 1:

Arrive in Camogli on the main La Spezia/Genoa railway line, where you'll spend your first night in a lovely four star hotel set in a restored noble residence in the centre of the town.

Day 2:

The first walk leaves Camogli and takes you along the spectacular coastline on the western edge of the Portofino National Park with vast views across the Gulf of Genoa (from here there is an extension to the tip of the point and back, 5 kms, 1.5 hrs) before climbing up into forest and then descending to Portofino. Your accommodation is in a small family run hotel in the heart of this celebrated village, a short walk from the port. (8 kms, 3 hrs)

Portofino optional extra day:

Your walk starts with a short ferry ride around the promontory to a beautifully restored 1000 year old abbey tucked in a tiny bay that is only accessible by water or on foot. Medieval stone stairs (used by the monks since the Middle Ages) take up through forest to the top of the national park then down through olive groves into the busy port of Santa Margherita. From where you can get a bus, ferry or walk back to Portofino (1 hr). (6 kms, 3 hrs)

Day 3:

Today you leave Portofino and take a lovely path that winds above the coast passing through olive groves with views over bays and hidden villas to Santa Margherita Ligure and then on to a neighbouring busy port, picking up the pilgrim trail and entering the town over a Roman bridge that Hannibal and his elephants reputedly crossed..... your accommodation is an excellent 4-star hotel on the waterfront. (11 kms, 3.5 hrs).

Day 4:

This extraordinary walk takes you around the waterfront before climbing a paved trail to a small church high above the coast. From here you continue along this ancient trail, disappearing into a beautiful forest of pine, oak and centuries old chestnut trees, touching a village and then continuing on a paved trail through olive groves with expansive views. This pilgrim trail takes you past several other sanctuaries before descending down to the port of Chiavari, where you stay in a 4-star hotel near the town's arcaded centre. (17 kms, 5 hrs).

It is possible to break the walk half way taking the train for the rest of the walk - 9 kms, 3 hrs

Day 5:

The last walk takes you along the sea front to the neighbouring town before picking up the pilgrim trail again, climbing up into the hills and following the old paved trail until you come and a ruined church with breathtaking views down over Sestri Levante and the Bay of Silences, your last destination. Your accommodation is lovely overlooking the bay a fitting finale to your walk. (15 kms, 4.5 hrs).

It is possible to break the walk half way taking the train for the rest of the walk - 11 kms, 3.5 hrs

Day 6:

Sestri Levante is on the Genoa/La Spezia line well serviced by regular trains in either direction (including to the Cinque Terre, three stops away to the east).