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PORTOVENERE, CINQUE TERRE, AND THE ISLANDS (PALMARIA, TINO AND TINETTO)

*“There- comes Triton / from the waves that lap
the threshold of a Christian / temple, and every
near hour is ancient. Every doubt / takes you
by hand as if by a young girl friend.
There – no one’s eyes / nor ears are bent on self.
Here – you are at the origins / and deciding is
foolish: re-begin later / to assume a nature.”*

Là fuoresce il Tritone, in Cuttlefish Bones, Eugenio Montale

An enchanted nature, with its moving beauty and scenic effect, and a charming history, off the main beaten tracks, but for this reason full of tradition and originality. Besides this, the perfect combination of natural grace and human contribution create a unique landscape of its kind for its natural and anthropic features, indissolubly linked to each other. The Ligurian Riviera east of Genoa that from the Cinque Terre stretches down to Portovenere promontory and the islands of Palmaria, Tino and Tinetto has been protected by UNESCO as Cultural Heritage since 1997. When, in 1874, this unmovable part of Italy was reached by the railway, it started to open up to a growing number of travellers, touching the sensitivity of great artists, poets and writers, both Italian and European. From Lord Byron to Eugenio Montale, from George Sand to Philippe Jaccottet, many were enraptured by these places during their journey or stay, and dedicated verses, books and artworks to them.



CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

UNESCO DOSSIER: **826BIS**
PLACE OF INSCRIPTION: **NAPLES, ITALY**
DATE OF INSCRIPTION: **1997**

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: The Ligurian Riviera between Portovenere and Cinque Terre, east of Genoa, is a cultural site of outstanding value that represents the harmonious interaction between people and nature, producing a landscape of exceptional scenic quality, and illustrating a traditional way of life that has existed for hundreds of years and continues to play an important socio-economic role in the life of the community.





“Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, nests of hawks and seagulls, Manarola and Riomaggiore are, going from west to east, the names of a few villages hamlets wedged between rocks and the sea.”

That is how the Cinque Terre are described by Eugenio Montale in *Fuori di casa*. Thanks to this itinerary you will be able to visit them until reaching Portovenere and the islands, gateway to the Gulf of Poets (actually the Gulf of La Spezia, from Portovenere to Tuscany), whose name derives from playwright Sem Benelli who, in 1910, coined this phrase to describe the inlet between San Terenzo and Lerici, not the whole gulf yet. This gulf deserves to be mentioned because it welcomed and inspired, among many others, Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio, Carducci, Pasolini, but also foreign authors such as Mary and Percy Shelley, Charles Dickens, Henry James, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence.

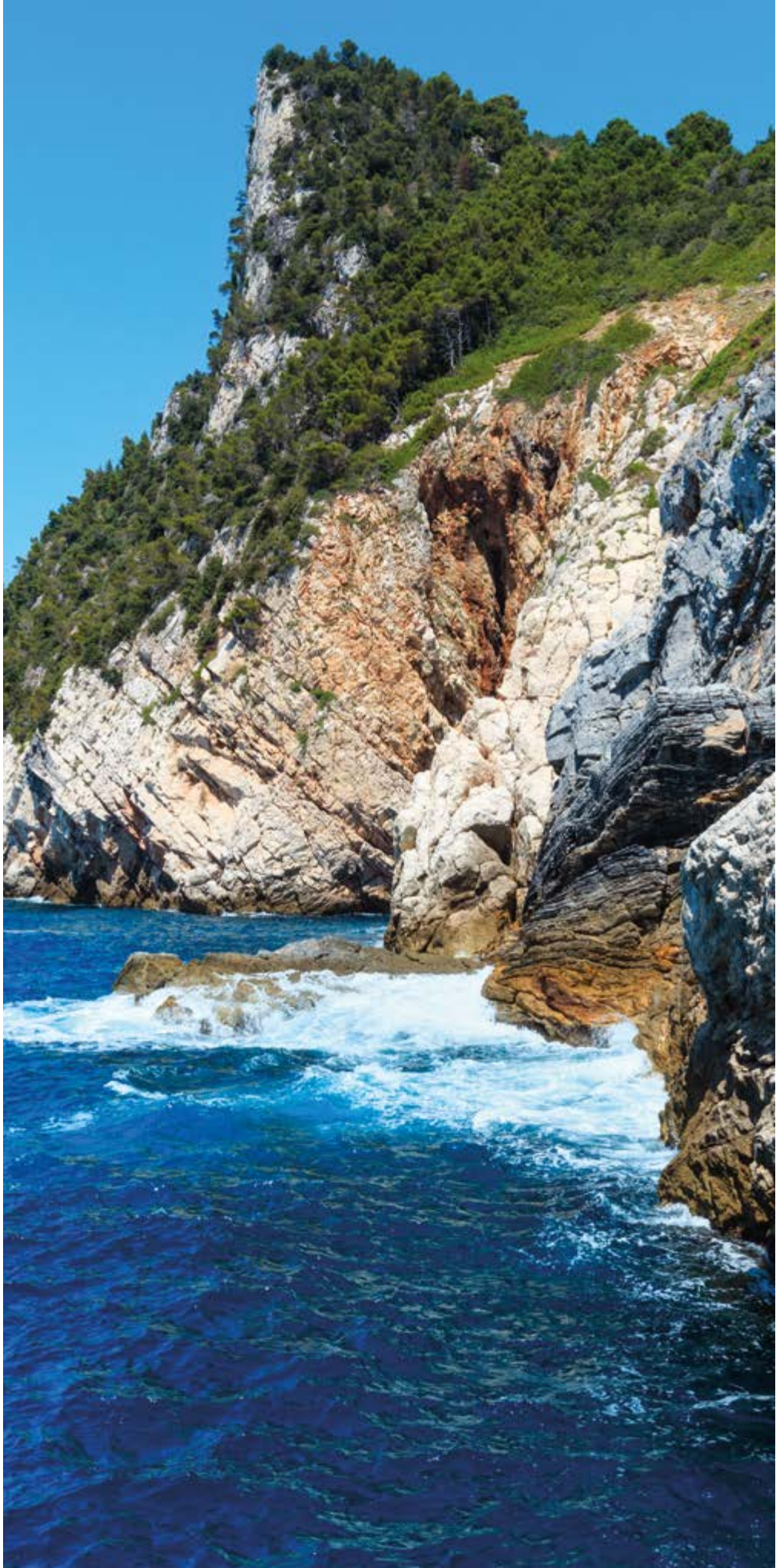
The sea, the steep cliffs, the hills and the magnificent nature offer an enchanting view, but not only: the five villages founded around the year one thousand by Val di Vara inhabitants, in apparently inaccessible places, prove that the sea and the mountain can communicate in unthinkable ways, when people's heroism can tame nature. Walk along the paths connecting them, on a trekking route which offers a unique experience, along the dry walls supporting the terraced lands overlooking the sea. Start from **1 Monterosso al Mare** first, the most “tamed” of the five villages, with its lovely alleys and



little squares, the churches and the literary influence of Eugenio Montale, who spent his childhood here. Then walk up to **2 Vernazza**, nestled in a perfect setting, made up of colourful houses and cliffs protruding to the sea. A similar image is offered by **3 Corniglia**, surrounded by expanses of vineyards in harmony with the colour of the water, to remind you how this village, almost inaccessible from the sea, is probably the most authentic, and to stress how its bond with the land is particularly evident. Then go to **4 Manarola**, where the acrobatic balance between the most exciting creations of nature and the

human ingenuity is striking. Finally, visit **5 Riomaggiore**, whose shady squares filled the canvases painted by Telemaco Signorini, member of the Macchiaioli group of painters. Heading south you will reach **6 Portovenere**: “Veneris Portus” of the Romans, loved by artists and poets alike (Lord Byron is said to have been inspired inside Grotta Arpaia, now known as Byron's Grotto, for the cave of *The Corsair*), mesmerises for its landscape made up of colourful towers-houses along the caruggi (alleyways), Doria Castle, the rugged promontory and, offshore, the outline of **7 Palmaria**, **8 Tino** and **9 Tinetto** islands.

MAP



PORTOVENERE ISLANDS

“Clumps of myrtle, some holm oaks, a rundown cloister. A lighthouse, a small bosom and the joyful sea waves.”

Gedichte, August von Platen-Hallermünde

Of the three islands in the Regional Natural Park of Portovenere, the largest is Palmaria. Here you can relax on the beach, circumnavigate the island to find its abandoned marble mines and military buildings, reach spectacular viewpoints or go climbing. South of Palmaria there is Tino, a rocky isle with a triangular shape, renamed “the island of mermaids’ by Shelley. It is under the Navy's jurisdiction, but it can be visited on 13th September, feast of the patron saint, with tours organised by the park authority. The impossibility to access it freely has preserved its lush nature, enchanting views and peculiar wildlife. The only trace of human presence is the lighthouse, a neoclassical fortified building that, for centuries, was a guide for the sailors. On the eastern side there are a marina, where the boats moor, and some Roman and Medieval ruins. Around 100 m from Tino there is Tinetto, no bigger than a rock. Similar to Tino, but lacking in vegetation, its charm derives from its history: in the 6th century a Benedictine monastery was set up here, then moved to Tino and finally to Palmaria.



"A LEGEND SAYS THAT WHEN A RED MULLET LOSES ITS COMPANION, IT STARTS TO CRY UNTIL IT DIES. PEOPLE ALSO SAY THAT THE SEA IN MANAROLA DID NOT EXIST BEFORE, THERE WERE ONLY VINEYARDS. THE SEA ARRIVED BECAUSE OF ALL THE CRYING RED MULLET THAT HAD BEEN LEFT BECAUSE UNLOVED, SO THAT IT ROSE UNTIL REACHING ITS CURRENT LEVEL."

The authentic universe of the Cinque Terre, apart from tourists and beaches, is told in this collection of children's stories (but not only!) *Storie vere di un mondo immaginario* by Dario Vergassola, an excellent book to read before leaving for this strip of land. The beauty and truth of these places are told from new perspectives – a boy who has become an octopus, a squid in love with a lemon, anchovies and tadpoles. Children and youngsters who enjoy trekking will follow you and appreciate the more or less long **Trekking route to Cinque Terre**. The less demanding paths are between Corniglia and Vernazza and between Vernazza and Monterosso: they do

present some difficulties, but the hills covered with vineyards, the views of the sea, the thrilling walk on steep paths and the rewarding feeling once you make it, a tour of the villages' colourful houses, a bath in the sea and the delicious *focaccia*, will leave you with unforgettable memories. If you join a walk organised by the Montale and the Cinque Terre Literary Park in **1 Monterosso al Mare**, go and have look at what Eugenio Montale defined as a 'yellowish pagoda', the liberty-style building that his family owned for decades, or have fun while searching for the plates with his poems. In **2 Vernazza** you can evoke stories about the sea around the Medieval tower of **Doria Castle**; in **3 Corniglia** enjoy counting the 377 steps of **Scalinata Lardarina**; in **4 Manarola** admire the huge light installation made up of sheet-metals, lightbulbs, cables and signs of the nativity scene which every year is lit up on the terraces overlooking the village (but you need to be there on 8th December); in **5 Portovenere** experience a boat adventure to the islands of **6 Palmaria**, **7 Tino** and **8 Tinetto**. If you want to find out more about *Levante* (eastern coast), you cannot miss the 12-km cycle path of Canale Lunense; in **Val di Vara**, La Spezia inland, you can enjoy **9 Lago Puro** and the paths (including a 250-m zip-line) of **10 Val di Vara Adventure Park**. Once back home, in order not to forget the landscape you have just seen, watch *Luca*, an animated movie released in 2021: the fictional village of Portorosso is the setting of the adventures of *Luca*, a marine monster, and his family and friends, a universe full of creatures inspired by the local legends of Liguria's *Riviera di Levante*.



KIDS



PORTOVENERE, CINQUE TERRE, AND THE ISLANDS in books

Reading suggestions to get into the heart of the territory.

- **The Corsair**, George Byron (1814). A semi-biographical tale, partly inspired by the poet's stay in Portovenere.
- **Elle et lui**, George Sand (1859). The journey to Italy of lovers Thérèse and Laurent is full of memories of Sand's direct experience, when she stayed in Portovenere and the Gulf of Poets.
- **Gedichte**, August von Platen-Hallermünde (1834). The German poet and playwright visited the Gulf of Poets as a tourist. He wrote many works about it, including an epigram dedicated to Tino island.
- **Porto Venere**, Carlo Linati (1910). Writer, translator, journalist and traveller, he wrote an intense portrait of this village that fascinated him and the great authors he admired and translated.
- **I racconti delle Cinque Terre**, Ettore Cozzani (1921). The characters and the landscape are indissolubly linked in this

collection of stories in a time when the Cinque Terre were still a world apart.

- **Cuttlefish Bones**, Eugenio Montale (1925). Cinque Terre and Portovenere are translated into verses by the Ligurian poet in his most famous collection, in particular in the poems *I limoni*, *La casa dei doganieri*, *Meriggiare pallido e assorto* and *Là fuoresce il Tritone*.
- **L'effraie et autres poésies**, Philippe Jaccottet (1953). In this collection, the French poet dedicates a poem to Portovenere, where he sets a love story full of abandonment and solitude.
- **Viaggio in Italia**, Guido Piovene (1957). Piovene travelled for three years across the Bel Paese to write a unique and extremely detailed reportage that is considered a classic of Italian travel literature. From the Alps to Sicily, crossing Liguria, the author invites us to discover Italian wonders.

• **Fuori di casa**, Eugenio Montale (1969). From the Cinque Terre to European and Middle Eastern countries: articles, notes and travel stories.

• **Vino al vino**, Mario Soldati (1977). The tale of three journeys to Italy in search for genuine wines turns into a charming portrait of local people and landscapes. Some of the mentioned

places include Palmaria, Riomaggiore and Tellaro, in the chapter dedicated to Ligurian provinces.

• **L'Italia in seconda classe**, Paolo Rumiz (2009). A goal: covering the same distance by train in Italy as that between Moscow and Vladivostok, and rigorously in second-class. An interesting portrait of Italy, written in an ironic and clever way. In the chapter "Il treno a filo di mare", Rumiz describes also the Cinque Terre.

• **Mare verticale. Dalle Cinque Terre a Bocca di Magra**, Marco Ferrari (2014). The rise and fall of the "most incredible Italian *buen retiro*", where several artists and travellers stayed.

Children's books:

• **Storie vere di un mondo immaginario**, Dario Vergassola (2021). Collection of tales where the author, Dario Vergassola from La Spezia, offers the view of the marine creatures living in Cinque Terre.

• **Luca**, directed by Enrico Casarosa and produced by Pixar/Walt Disney Studios (2021). The director's childhood in Liguria inspires a globally successful cartoon.