

# Liguria

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 'Take five' in **Cinque Terre** (p56) on the Sentiero Azzurro between Monterosso al Mare and Riomaggiore
- Take the high road and find relative solitude on the **Sentiero Rosso** (p60) on the hills above Cinque Terre
- See how the richest 1% live amid the yachts and Ferraris of ritzy **Portofino** (p64)

Signature food: *Pesto al genovese*

Celebrated native: Christopher Coloumbus

Famous for... Swanky beach resorts

With the five towns of Unesco-listed Cinque Terre grafted like diamond crystals onto its rocky cliffs, the Ligurian coastline contains one of the most popular – and hence, busiest – hikes in Italy. The Sentiero Azzurro (Blue Trail) links the five classic coastal settlements of Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza and Monterosso al Mare via a steep, scenic, coastal trail that winds for 12 precipitous kilometres among terraced escarpments replete with ecstatic views.

For centuries an eastern outpost of the Most Serene Republic of Genoa, Liguria's history is written all over its steep-sided cliffs in diminutive chapels, hidden coves, and deftly terraced olive groves. It is also preserved underfoot on an intricate network of narrow paths that have been trodden down by generations of farmers, monks, sailors, townsfolk and – more recently – tourists.

Aside from the insanely popular Sentiero Azzurro, Liguria harbours plenty of other trails, including the Sentiero Rosso, a longer, higher-altitude version of the Azzurro that gets about one-tenth of the traffic. Countless small paths link the two, some skirting farmland, others visiting half-forgotten sanctuaries or faded Stations of the Cross. Further along the coast the intensely varied Portofino promontory is a surreal mix of deserted coves and sheltered harbours where expensive yachts act as floating homes to holidaying millionaires.



## HISTORY

In its turbulent history marked by successive conquests and sea raids, the province of Liguria has been ruled by Greeks, Saracens, Romans, Venetians, Lombards and French, with strong early trade influences from as far afield as Sicily (Sicilia), North Africa and Spain. The many fortified buildings that dot the coast are a reminder that trade and prosperity came at a cost.

Liguria's fortunes have been closely tied to those of Genoa (Genova) since the town gained independence in 1162 and began to extend its influence along the coastline. Successful expansion by the mercantile powers between the 13th and 18th centuries transformed Liguria into a prosperous region of considerable maritime importance. Genoa reached its peak in the 16th century under the rule of imperial admiral Andrea Doria, and managed to benefit from Spain's American fortunes by financing Spanish exploration. However, as the importance of the Mediterranean declined, so too did the region's influence.

In 1796 Napoleon Bonaparte captured Genoa and in 1805 the Republic of Liguria became part of the French Empire. After 1814, with the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, Liguria was absorbed into the kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont (Sardegna-

Piemonte). In 1861 Vittorio Emanuele II, king of Sardinia, became the first king of a still fragmented Italy. Genoa played a leading role in the process of Italian unification during the remaining decades of the 19th century, and was the first northern city to rise against the German and Italian fascists towards the close of WWII.

In more recent times Genoa has become Italy's most important port, attracting a massive influx of workers from outlying regional areas and further abroad. Liguria itself has prospered from the postwar industrial expansion of the north and enjoys a good standard of living.

## CLIMATE

Protected by both the Alps and the Apennines (Apennini) from cold northerly weather patterns, Liguria enjoys a mild, Mediterranean climate, with average daily maximum temperatures ranging between 10°C in winter and 28°C in summer. The annual rainfall is between 1000mm and 1250mm.

## PLANNING

### When to Walk

With a pleasant climate year-round, walking in Liguria is recommended at any time. Come in the spring and autumn if you want to avoid the summer crowds and heat.

