



Cinque Terre: A Journey through Italy's Five Charming Villages

Description

"Italy is a dream that keeps returning for the rest of your life."
Anna Akhmatova

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Manarola Cinque Terra

In the scenic region of Northern Italy, you will find Cinque Terre, a collection of five charming villages. These historic settlements, known as the “five lands,” are nestled into the rugged cliffs along the Italian Riviera in the picturesque region of Liguria. With origins dating back to the Middle Ages, the villages were traditionally connected by mule tracks and could only be accessed by sea or rail. Even today, the timeless charm of Cinque Terre remains essentially unchanged, with the absence of cars lending a tranquil, old-world atmosphere. Instead of bustling vehicles, the streets are full of vibrant wooden fishing boats, evoking a sense of maritime heritage and tradition. Here, the absence of prominent museums and grand boulevards is a deliberate choice, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the pure beauty of the sun, sea, wine, and unspoiled nature.

Cinque Terre holds a special place in our hearts as one of the most enchanting destinations on the planet. Its rugged, imperfect beauty is nothing short of extraordinary. When we first set foot in this region, we were immediately spellbound by the breathtaking views of the Ligurian Sea. However, it was the charming villages themselves that truly captured our hearts and sparked our imagination. Words fall short of conveying the indescribable essence of being in Cinque Terre; it is an experience that defies all attempts at verbal expression.

What are the five towns of Cinque Terre?

The picturesque Italian villages of Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola, and Riomaggiore are cradled along the coastline, enveloped by vibrant olive groves and vineyard-draped hills. Their idyllic setting seems almost surreal, with homes perched on rocky cliffs and narrow, winding streets punctuated by countless steps. These communities have ingeniously adapted to the rugged terrain, creating compact coastal villages and small hillside settlements. As you wander through these enchanting locales, you'll encounter a captivating blend of hardworking locals and mesmerized tourists, all drawn to the inimitable allure of Cinque Terre, where Italian culture harmoniously intertwines with breathtaking natural beauty.

Oh, those images!

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Cinque Terra, Italy

The stunning images of Cinque Terre are renowned worldwide, and once you set foot there, you'll quickly understand why. The first thing that strikes you is the extraordinary burst of color that seems to have been painted onto these ancient villages as if the entire spectrum of the rainbow has come to life. The scene is almost surreal in its beauty. The buildings cluster together, each one boasting a rich palette of vibrant blues, striking reds, delicate pinks, and warm oranges. The use of natural stone for roofing gives the villages a distinct and captivating appearance. In the foreground, the Ligurian Sea glistens in a mesmerizing shade of blue, while the background has the lush, verdant hues of the mountain range. It truly feels like paradise here, and there's so much more to discover if you choose to extend your stay and delve deeper into the area's captivating history.

A photographic gem that a photograph can never do justice

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All those incredible photos displayed here can't begin to capture what it is like in person. There is something special here. The five villages were built so long ago on terrain that seems almost impossible to live on, more or less built on. This was an isolated and challenging life. The harsh and often violent sea and the steep and rugged hillsides where they farm speak to the hardiness and resilience of the generations that have called Cinque Terre home. The land continues to require a life of backbreaking work. You may expect the locals to be stoic and harsh, but we found them warm and friendly, with a glint in their eyes and joy of life so many places have lost.

A way of life



The locals believe in “dolce far niente,” or the art of doing nothing. This mindset is about sitting back and relaxing. They value slowing down and enjoying what life has to offer. The work is hard, so they cherish their downtime. Try it when you visit; it may give you a new perspective on your life and travels. We all need to sit and smell the roses.

UNESCO Recognition



In 1997, UNESCO designated the five villages of Cinque Terre, together with Portovenere and the islands of Palmaria, Tino, and Tinetto, as UNESCO World Heritage sites. They wrote, *“The Ligurian coast between Cinque Terre and Portovenere is a cultural landscape of great scenic and cultural value. The layout and disposition of the small towns and the shaping of the surrounding landscape, overcoming the disadvantages of steep, uneven terrain, encapsulate the continuous history of human settlement in this region over the past millennium.”*

The National Park of the Cinque Terre opened in 1999 as a result of the designation. This UNESCO status allowed the preservation of the land in the Cinque Terre by making it a national park and creating walking trails in each village. As a result, it has offered even greater protection to the region.

Some background on Cinque Terre



Historical documents evidence the history of Cinque Terre, which dates back to the 11th century. The discovery of remains such as bones and primitive tools supports the presence of primitive individuals. The initial settlements of Monterosso and Vernazza were established, followed by the development of the other villages. In response to threats from the Turks, residents of Cinque Terre reinforced existing forts and constructed new defense towers during the 16th century. However, the region experienced a period of economic decline from the 17th to the 19th centuries.

The recovery of the region began with the establishment of an arsenal near La Spezia and the construction of a railway link to Genoa. However, this railway development led to a decline in the population of the villages and traditional industries. Fortunately, in the 1970s, the growth of tourism brought about a revival of prosperity in the area. Today, the Cinque Terre heavily depends on tourism revenue. The region's stunning villages and the surrounding countryside have been designated as the

Cinque Terre National Park, offering some of the most exceptional hiking experiences in the world.

Agriculture at its core



These villages were remote for much of their lives, nestled within the hilly coastal terrain. Over the centuries, locals built terraces into the hillside to help them farm against their steep hill backdrop. Although the villages overlook the Ligurian Sea, fishing was not the leading trade for the towns of Cinque Terre. The main trade in Cinque Terre was growing olives and winemaking. These practices were only possible due to the artificial terraces, as they created the right conditions for the grapes and olives to grow. They remain the main crops that grow in this region to this day.

Another crop that does well in this region is lemons, and limoncino is a popular local product. It is similar to the limoncello that harks from the Amalfi Coast of Italy but is creamier. Basil grows well here, and pesto is on many store shelves. To this day, the landscape is sustained by traditional farming. That said, the terraced agricultural system and water management are pretty vulnerable. A disaster occurred in October 2021 when torrential rain caused mudslides and deaths in Vernazza and Monterosso. Efforts in the future will need to help farmers keep their livelihoods and maintain the landscape.

Want to learn more about Italy? Check out our [Italy Travel Guide](#)

Fun fact about Cinque Terre

The unique biome of the water in the protected harbors of the villages is extremely rich and nurturing for various marine life. This is why fishing here is so prolific, and the seafood is superb.

The Five Lands of Cinque Terre with Photo Gallery

Manarola

Sitting atop a massive cliff, Manarola is the most photogenic and prettiest of the Cinque Terre villages. With its narrow alleys, ancient buildings, medieval relics, Gothic churches, and fascinating harbor, it resonates with authenticity. There are also many fun shops offering local products and great restaurants. Manarola is the village we fell in love with the most. It draws many day tourists during the peak of the day, which can take away from the experience. But once the last milk run train has left for the evening, the town transforms and is a joy to wander.

Sometimes, in the evening, we didn't come across a single soul. Climbing what felt like thousands of steps, we explored the ancient alleys and pathways. Our wanderings revealed great pride and care in this humble community. Even though these buildings were hundreds of years old, they did not abandon them but made a life in them. It was captivating and heartwarming.

There are several hotels and guest houses where you can stay overnight in Manarola. When Joelle visited with her sister-in-law, they had a small one-bedroom apartment higher in the village. It was perfect. The building was old and had lovely views. Of course, it had a clothesline to dry our laundry.

The village has the highest concentration of grapevines of any Cinque Terre village. Manarola's pride is its tasty Sciacchetra wine, which pairs well with cheese or desserts.

What to do in Manarola

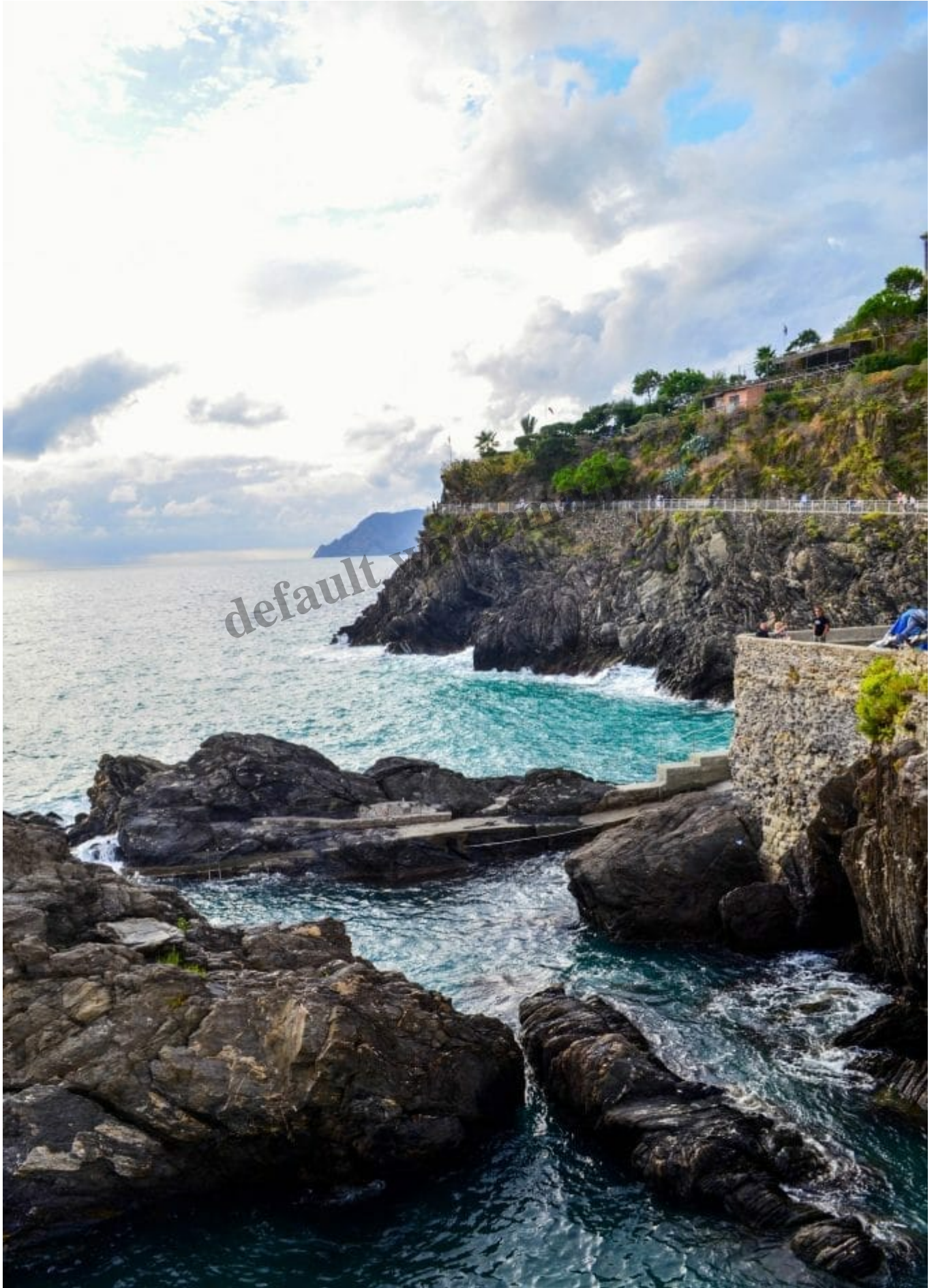
Although its narrow lanes are lovely to explore, you should wander along the coast to the Manarola Scenic Viewpoint and admire the contrast of the colorful homes against the green terraces and grey rocks. Deep-sea swimming is popular here, although there is no sandy beach. A fun activity is to watch the fishing boats brought down or up by a boom into the ocean. The harbor is high above the water, and the small fishing boats have no way down to the sea other than the boom.

Manarola has some fantastic restaurants (check out our list farther down in the post). Stroll down Via Renato Birolli and Via Antonio Discovo to view all your choices. Enjoy the fresh seafood from the local fisherman. The fresh anchovies in olive oil were incredible.

Other attractions include the Manarola Castle, the Gothic Church San Lorenzo, the Manarola Nativity Scene, Via Belvedere, wineries, sunset boat tours, and strolling the Via Dell'Amore (The Way of Love). By far, this is the best village for adventure enthusiasts, and Manarola is an excellent location from which hikers can launch.

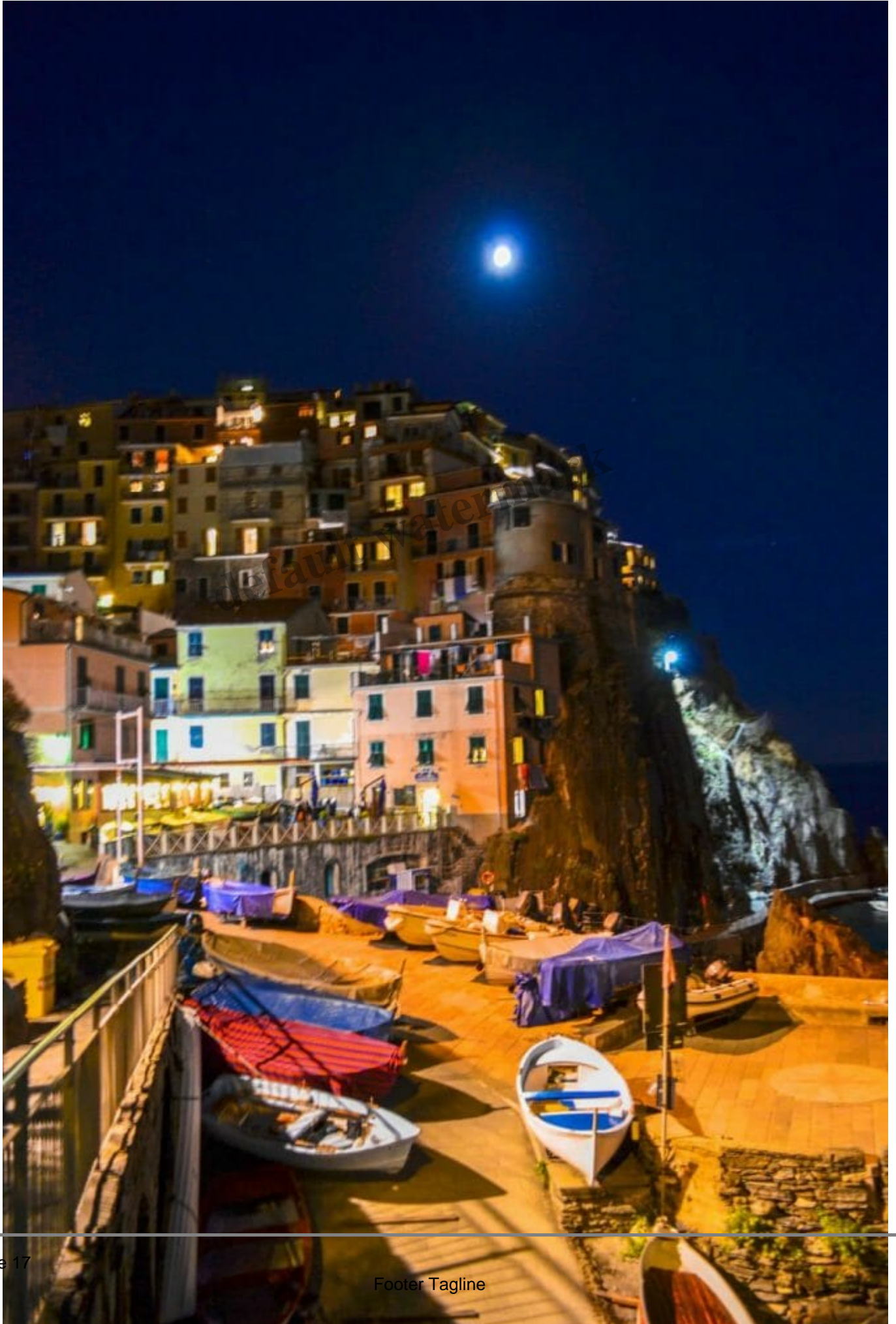
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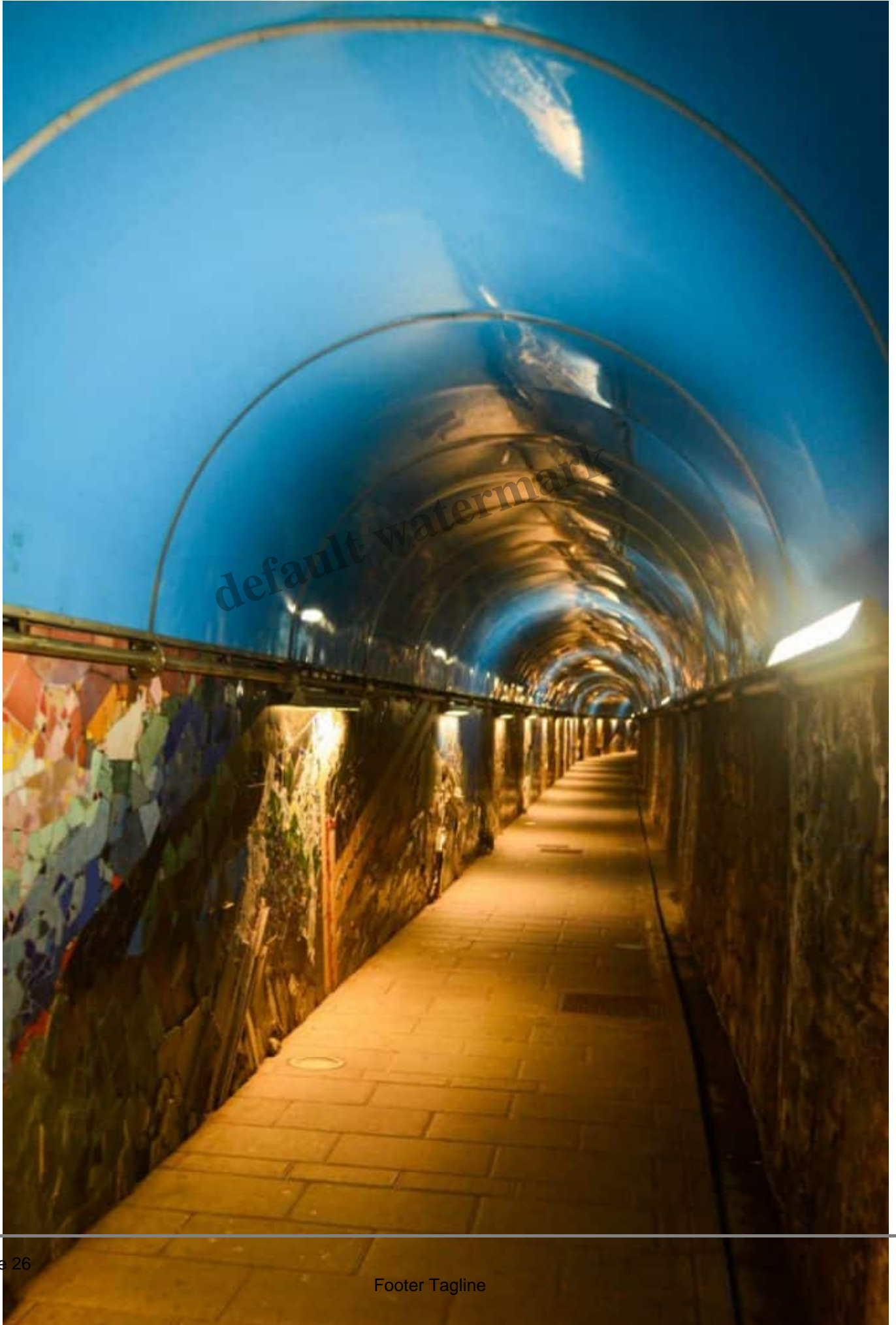
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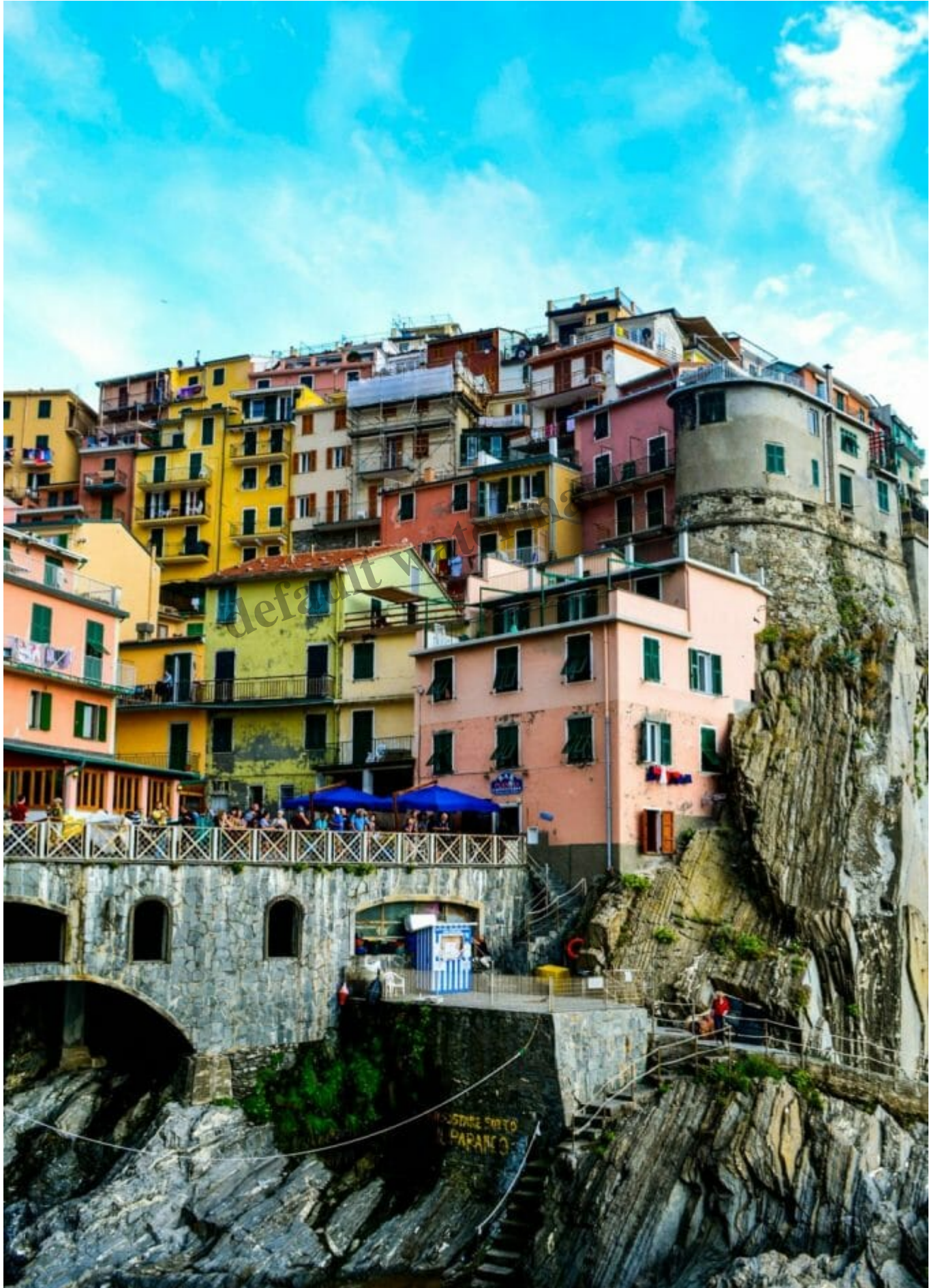
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Vernazza

Vernazza is the second most picturesque village in Cinque Terre. For those who follow Rick Steves, it is his favorite of the five. It has the only natural harbor in the region that is easily accessible to the town. It is also the most photographed waterfront in Cinque Terre. You will always see some fisherman hauling his boat in or out of the harbor, and it is easy to get up close to the water. Vernazza is known for its majestic beauty and colorful waterfront homes stacked upon each other.

This village was once fortified to defend the Cinque Terre villages from sea pirates. The 15th-century lookout tower on the cliff's edge once protected the town from pirates. Reaching the top requires climbing up a steep staircase, but it's well worth it. This unforgettable panoramic experience will bring you back to days long past and will only add to the wonder of Vernazza.

What to do in Vernazza

The best thing to do here is to wander around and take in the buzzing atmosphere of Piazza Marconi. This waterfront square has rows of colorful buildings and contains the best bars, restaurants, and gelato shops.

Wander down the narrow cobblestone streets, explore the impressive Doria castle with gorgeous views, and visit the beautiful Gothic church Santa Margherita d'Antiochia. The building has an eye-catching octagonal bell tower and narrow arched windows that reveal a stunning sea view. Hike up to various lookout points to get some of the villages' best views.











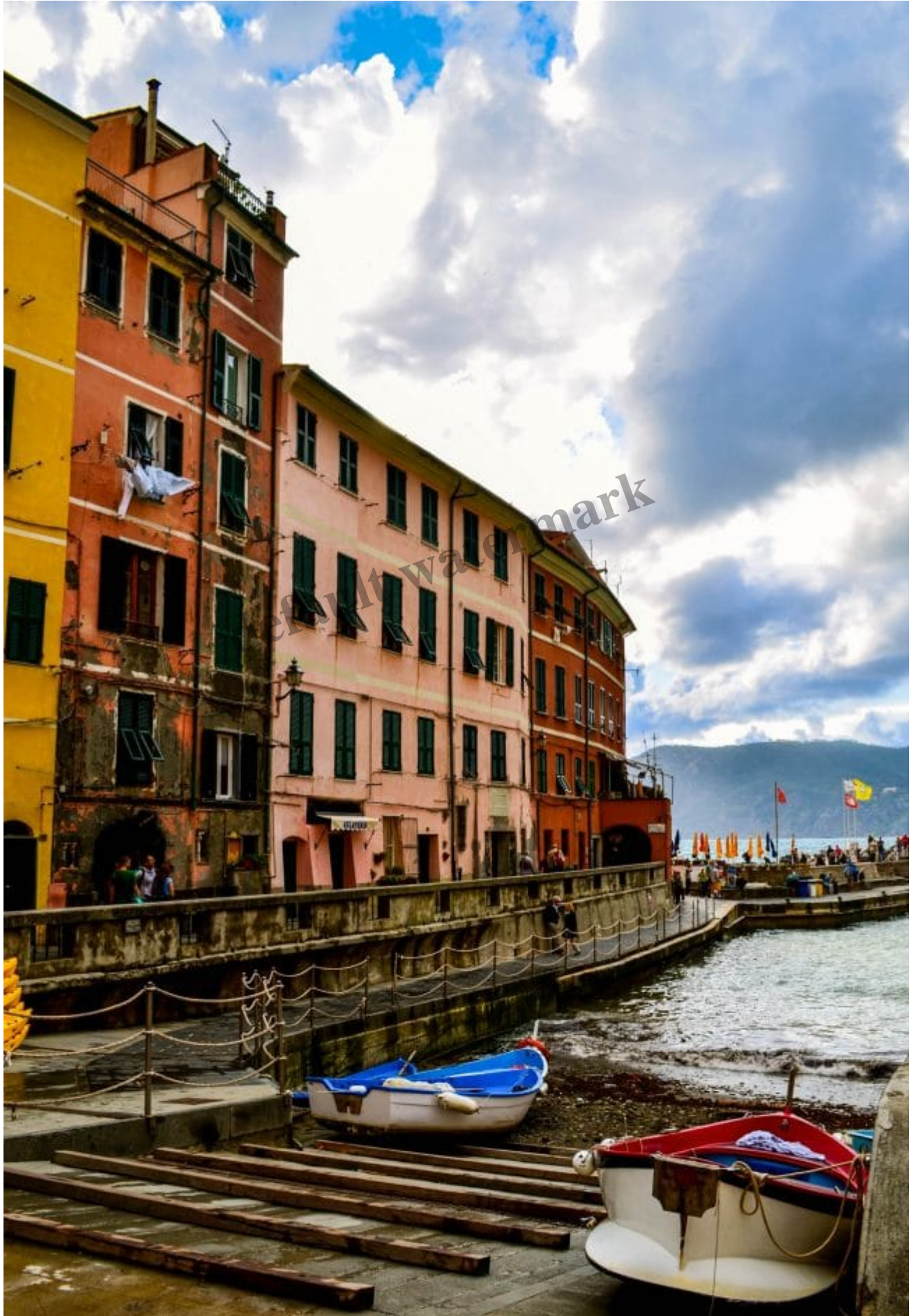
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All those incredible photos you have taken indeed can't begin to capture what it is like in person, [making holiday photo cards](#) an ideal way to share its beauty.

Corniglia

Not directly adjacent to the sea, Corniglia is the smallest and most relaxed of all the villages. That does not mean, though, that it lacks beauty and charm. It is stunning, and the views on all sides are exceptional. Surrounded by vineyards high up the mountainsides, it is famous for its wine. The viewpoint from the village's end is the only place you can view all five lands of Cinque Terre.

If visitors miss a village, this is the one as Corniglia does not have direct sea access. Located about 550 above sea level, you must climb 365 steep stairs from the train station to the town of Corniglia. It is a long climb, but they are wide steps with railings. We took the steps slowly, and the views along the way were worth it. It is easy to stop and rest as you climb. Shuttle buses are also available at a cost. We chose not to take them due to the wait and lines.

What to do in Corniglia

Upon reaching the top, take time to soak in the sweeping views of the Mediterranean and all the villages of Cinque Terre. Stroll down the narrow streets and enjoy the colorful buildings while exploring the bustling town.

Attractions include Oratorio dei Disciplinati di Santa Caterina and Chiesa di San Pietro. San Pietro has a window carved from marble. It was interesting to get up close to the vineyards in Corniglia and watch how they work on these steep hillsides and transport the grapes.

If you want to stay the night, this is the less touristy village. Once the day tourists leave, you won't find many tourists, and you will discover what life was like in Cinque Terre before it became a well-known destination.











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Comune di Vernazza
← **Corniglia**

Gli operatori turistici vi invitano a visitare Corniglia
You're welcome, visit our village

Il paese è raggiungibile a piedi - 365 gradini percorrenza 15" - o con il bus del Parco Nazionale (Ticket €1,50, gratuito per i possessori delle Cinque Terre Card)

To reach the village:
walk up, 365 steps, 15" minutes or
take the official National Park bus
(ticket € 1.50 or free for
Cinque Terre Card holders)

NUMERI UTILI

Comune di Vernazza	0187821247	Pronto Intervento Sanitario	118
	fax 0187812212	Emergenza Incendi-Vigili del Fuoco	115
Polizia Municipale	0187821147	Corpo Forestale dello Stato	
Carabinieri	0187817524	comando stazione di Volastra	0187760031
Farmacia	0187812396	numero verde nazionale	1515
Guardia medica locale	0187821088	Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre ufficio informazioni	
Guardia medica		FF.SS.	0187812523
		Azienda Provinciale	





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Riomaggiore

This village of Cinque Terre dates back to the early 13th century. Riomaggiore is the southernmost village and the first of the five villages if you take the train from La Spezia. It is compact, intimate, colorful, and perched high on the cliff edge. It is best known for its terraced vineyards and mesmerizing harbor. As the second-largest village, several hotel and restaurant options make it another good choice for visitors.

It has the genuine feel of a small Italian village. Riomaggiore is the ideal place to taste some gelato and limoncinos. We took the time to visit its small pebble beach; the beach wasn't much, but the walk down and setting was worth it. The town is quite hilly, but the panoramic views make it worthwhile.

What to do in Riomaggiore

Attractions in Riomaggiore include its Medieval Castle, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Montenero, the Church of San Giovanni Battista, and the Oratory of San Rocco. The 19th-century Italian artist Telemaco Signorini's paintings of beautiful Riomaggiore figuratively put it on the map.

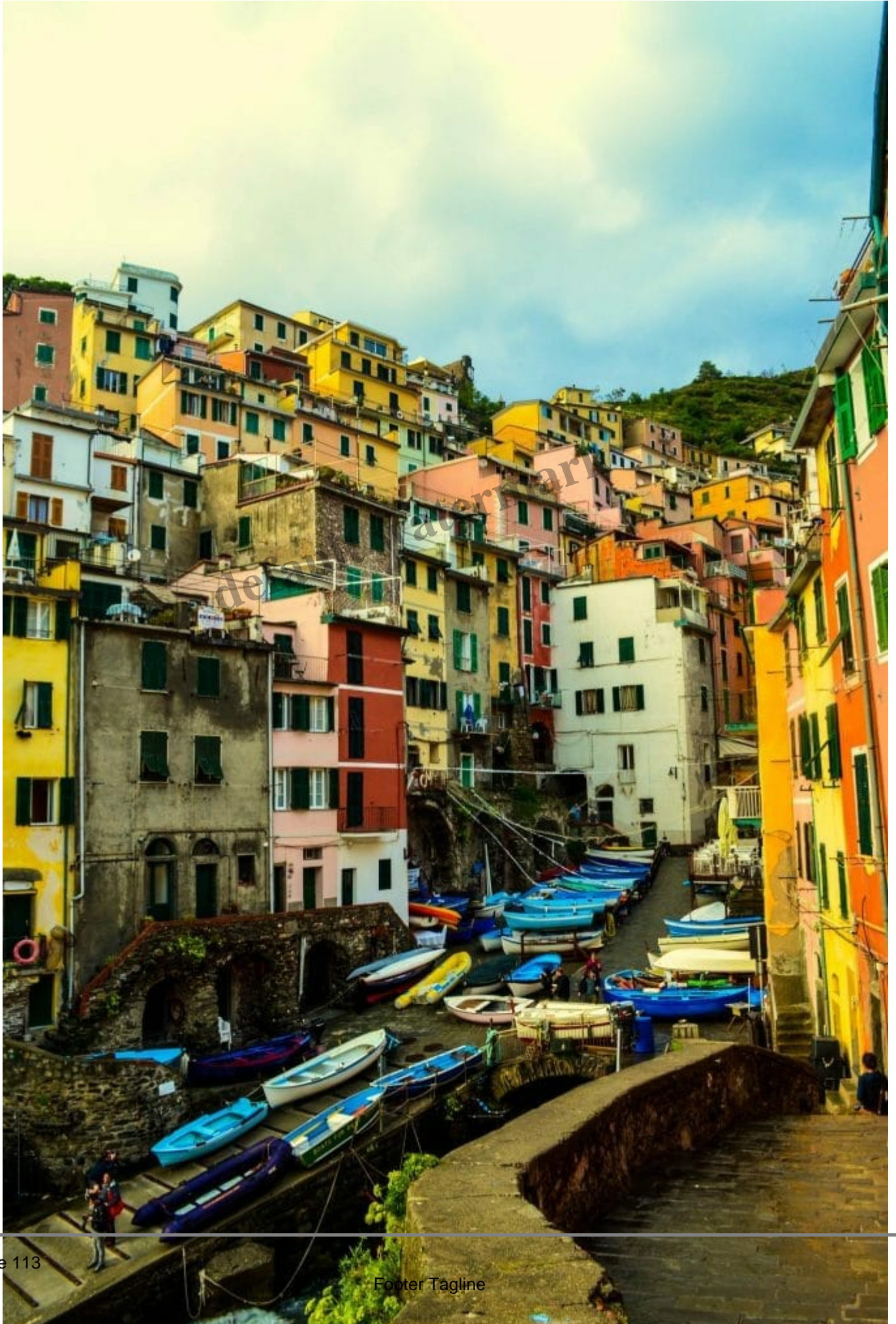
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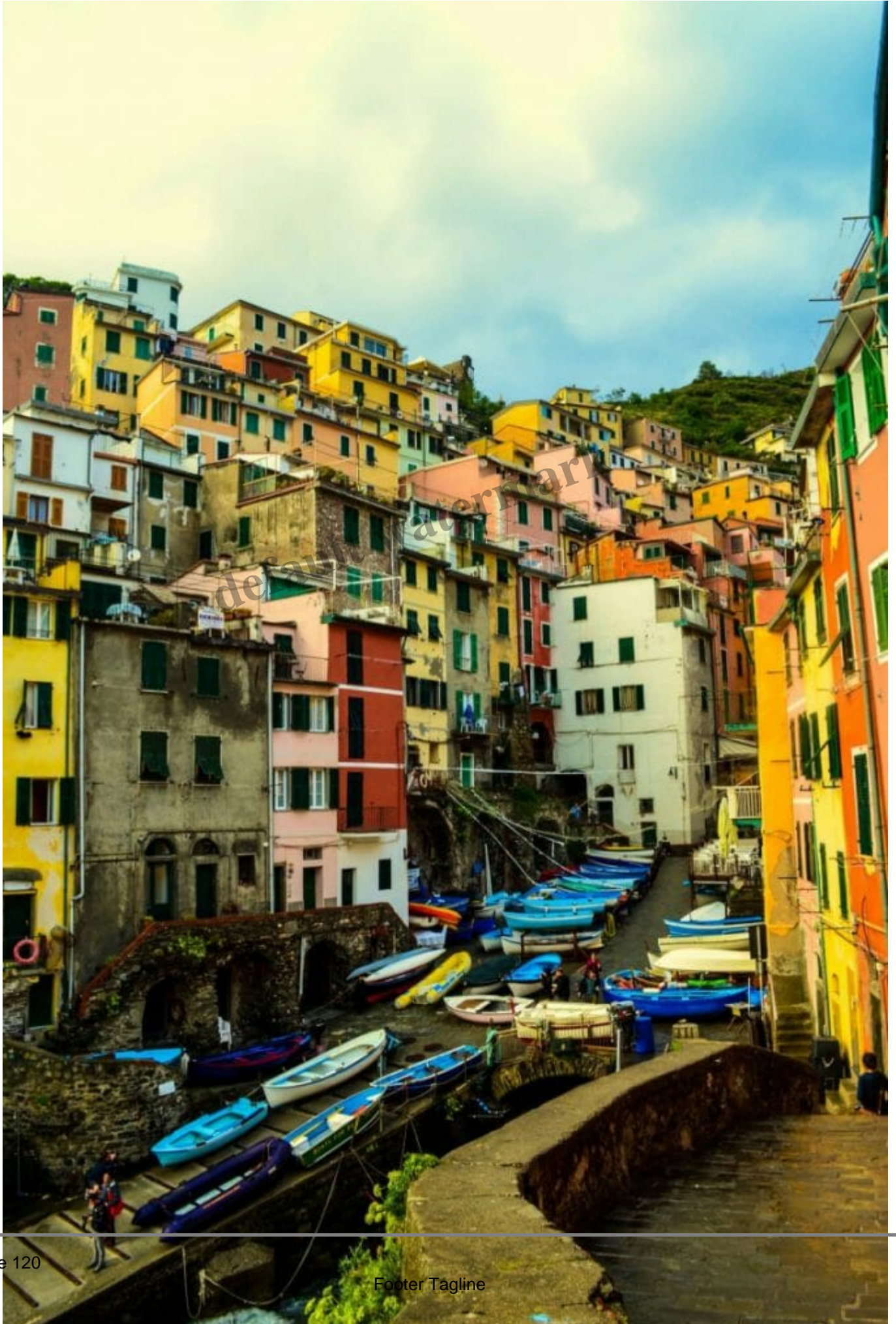


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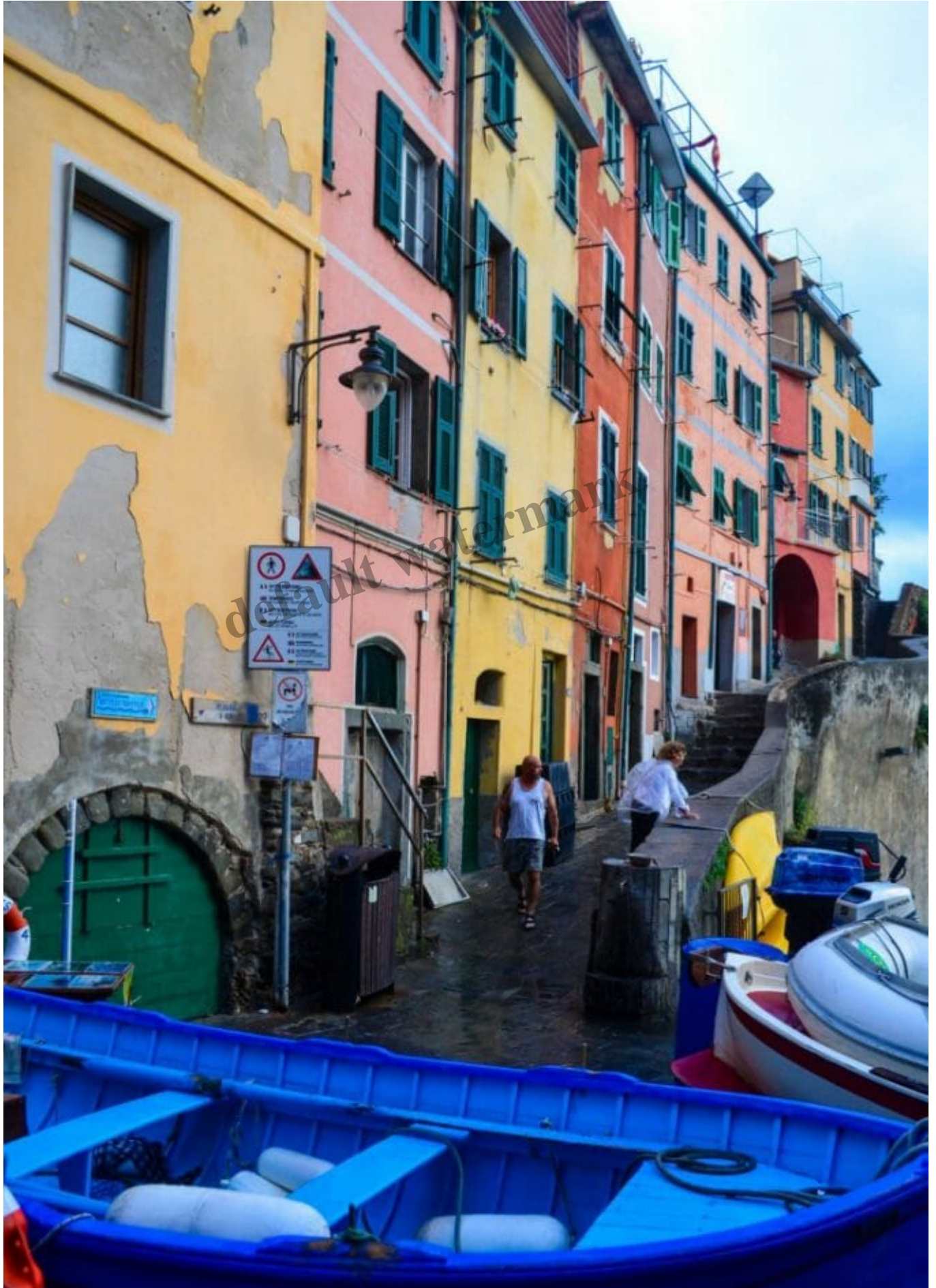
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Monterosso al Mer

Monterosso al Mare is the largest of the five coastal fishing villages and is most well known for its beaches, reefs, and crystal-clear turquoise water. It has the best beaches in Cinque Terre and is the village's only genuinely sandy beach. It's a beautiful spot for sunbathing and swimming, and you'll find gelato shops, restaurants, and various other shops along the promenade. Paragliding is a popular

activity here, too.

Monterossa al Mar is divided into Old and New Towns. If coming by train, it will drop you off in the Old Town area. The two sections are connected with a tunnel. The five villages' largest hotels, restaurants, and shops are in New Town and have a resort atmosphere. Here, you will also get to see remnants of the Art Nouveau Villa. The Old Town does have a character with many cute shops and places to eat. The village is alone worth visiting for its sweet-smelling lemon trees, olive groves, and white wines.

What to do Monterosso al Mar

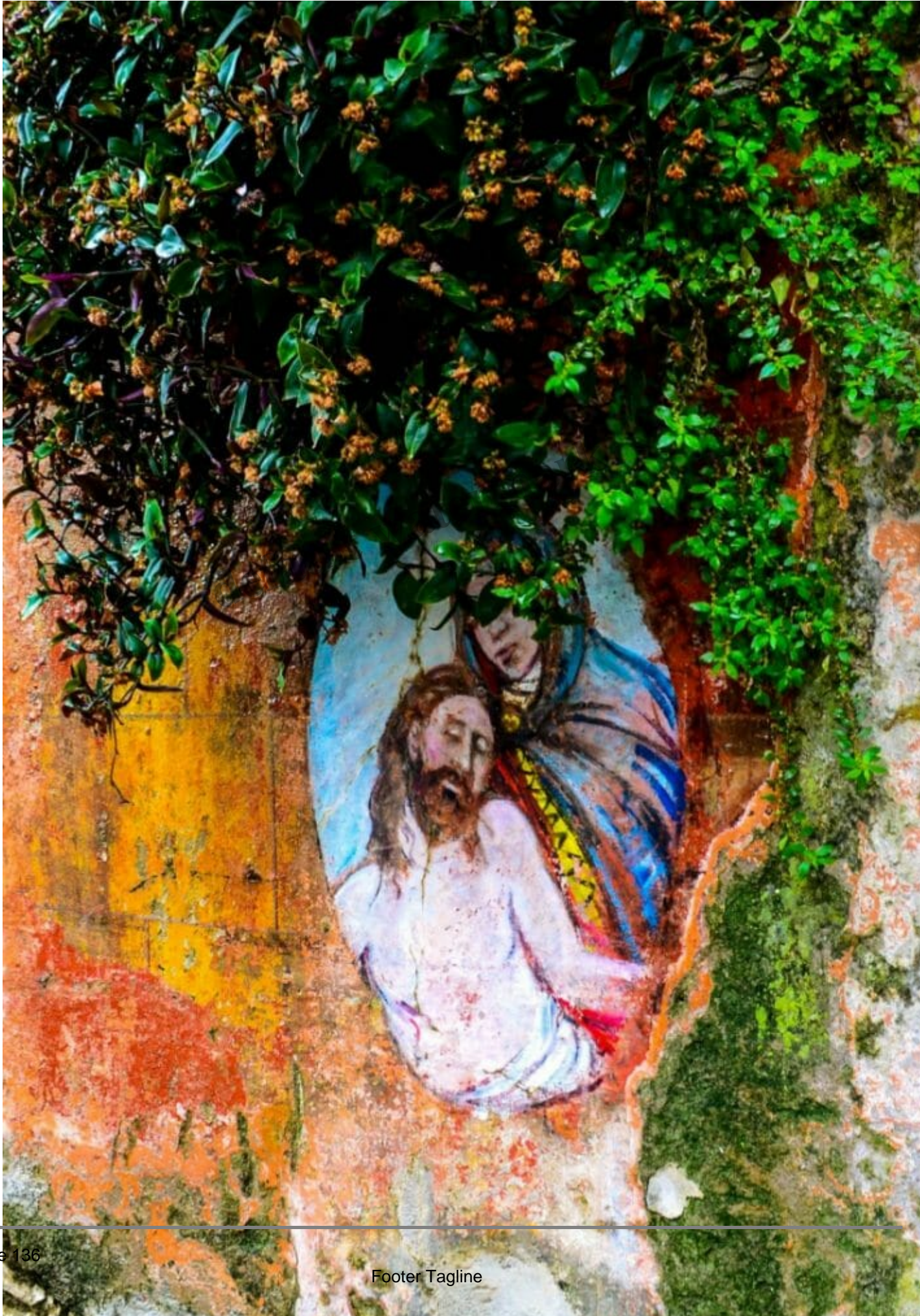
There is quite a bit to do in Monterosso al Mar, starting with visiting the walls of the ancient fortress, the Fieschi Castle ruins, and the Aurora Tower. There is also the Gothic 14th Century Church of St. Giovanni the Baptist and the Capuchin Monastery. Next to the church on Piazza Don Giovanni Minzoni is the 16th-century Oratorio dei Neri, aka the Oratory of the Dead. The statue was almost destroyed during WW2.

Not our first choice

Monterosso al Mer was our least favorite of the five villages. It felt too touristy and much less authentic compared to the other villages. In the late hours of the evening, it was still primarily tourists out and about. It would not be our choice if we stayed the night in Cinque Terre, though it is popular with many visitors. The resorts are known for their premier service and exceptional views. If beaches are your thing, rent some chairs, grab some beverages, kick back, and relax in the sun. It's a great way to spend an afternoon. This town has the best nightlife in Cinque Terre.



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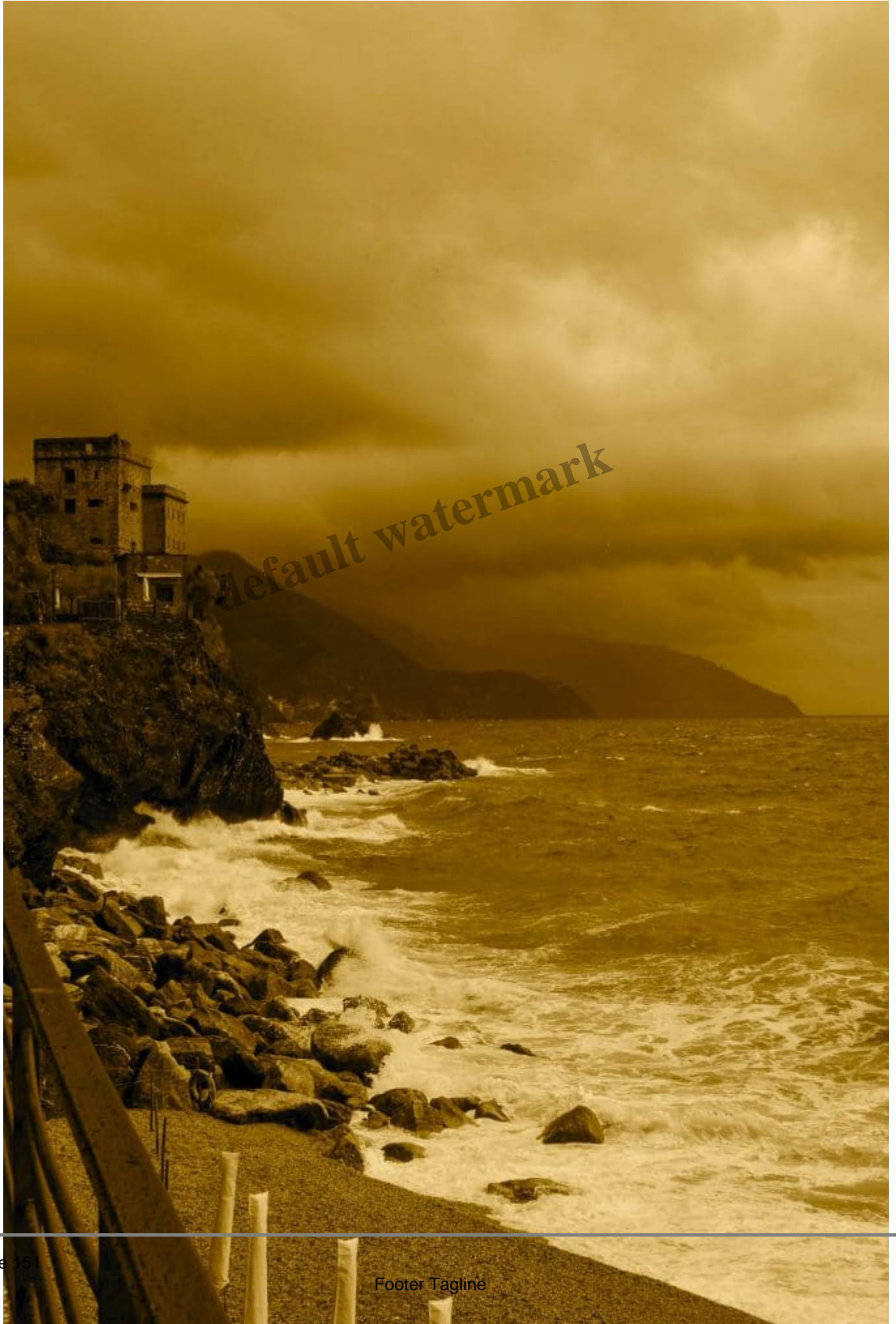


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Is a day trip worth it?

Joelle has experienced Cinque Terre in both ways. If you're visiting for the first time, it's best to plan for a few nights' stay to soak in its unique beauty. Rushing through it in just one day could cause you to miss out on what makes this place so unique, and you might also have to deal with large crowds. t on what makes this place so unique, and you may have to deal with large crowds during your whole visit.

The second visit with Ryan was only a day trip. We left Florence by train at 6:30 am and took the last milk run train out of Manarola we could get that night. Believe it or not, we had a couple-hour stop in Pisa on the way from Florence. We felt this was doable since Joelle had been there; we planned the day out intricately with highlights and saw four of the five towns. Corniglia was not a good idea climbing all those steps in the rain. It was a glorious day with a leisurely meal on the piazza in Manarola before catching the last milk run train back to La Spezia and then Florence, arriving at 11:30 pm. Having done it both ways, even if you can give it only one night, DO SO!

The sunsets and sunrises of Cinque Terre

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Upon our visit, little had we known about the breathtaking sunsets and sunrises that awaited us. Experiencing their spectacular beauty firsthand made it clear why so many people hold this place in such high regard. Throughout history, renowned Romantic authors such as Byron and Shelley have attempted to immortalize the dazzling allure of the Cinque Terre in their literary works.

The most breathtaking sunsets can be experienced from the elevated villages. It's essential to plan your day to ensure you don't miss the stunning spectacle. One of the most remarkable spots is at the top of Manarola, offering a panoramic view that's simply unparalleled. Additionally, the high cliffs in Corniglia serve as an ideal vantage point to witness the sunset over the mesmerizing Ligurian Sea. The sky transitions from a gentle pink hue to a deep, dark blue, eventually revealing a mesmerizing starry night. For an even more enchanting experience, try to find a trattoria where you can savor the local cuisine while witnessing this natural wonder.

Map of the Cinque Terre Villages

Guide to Hiking in the Cinque Terre



AdobeStock Cinque Terre

The Cinque Terre National Park is the smallest in Italy and was designated in 1999. It covers an area of only 15 square miles but packs in that area some gorgeous scenery, with a mix of rocky cliffs, scenic coves, clear blue waters, terraced vineyards, and olive groves linked by a network of trails.

Visitors can explore 48 different hiking paths throughout the Cinque Terre National Park. The four most popular trails connect the five villages, but others take you up into the backcountry and provide longer alternatives to the main four. With so many options, you can see why hiking is one of the best things to do in Cinque Terre and draws visitors worldwide.

Trails in the Cinque Terre have three degrees of difficulty: tourist, hiking, and skilled. Each path has a number, like 592-2, for Manarola to Corniglia. Some also belong to a route like SVA-2, which refers to

the Cinque Terre's coastal path.

Always be prepared

If you plan to head into the mountains, bring proper gear. There are a few things you'll want to pack when hiking here. First and foremost, you'll want good hiking shoes if you take the more challenging trails or plan on walking a lot. You'll also need to bring a refillable water bottle. It also pays to be sun smart, so wear a hat and regularly apply sunscreen. The sun is intense in this section of the world.

Here are the main trails to consider

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Hiking Trails in Cinaue Terre Adobe Stock Photo

The Sentiero Alto (High Path) Path #1

The High Path is an old mule track, perhaps dating back to Roman times, which runs along the ridge that separates the coast from the backcountry. The central part is inside the Cinque Terre, starting at Levanto on the west and ending at Porto Venere on the east. It is over 25 miles long. It gets elevated at some points, crossed by many secondary paths that descend towards the sea, La Spezia, and Val di Vara. The Sentiero Alto is straight and well-maintained. The difficulty is medium-level but accessible to everyone who reasonably fits and wears the right gear. The whole path takes at least ten hours to

hike, but splitting the route into several stages is recommended.

Sentiero Azzurro (Blue Path) Path #2

The Blue Path is one of the most popular pedestrian routes in the area because it is doable for most people because of its spectacular views provided to the millions of walkers that hike it year-round. This path existed in Medieval times (except for the segment that coincides with the Via dell'Amore (Walk of Love), which dates back to 1900); it was the only road to the coast. From Sentiero Azzurro, dozens of mule tracks break off, which go up to the crest of the hill. Taking this path, you will find a tight network of routes crossing dry stone walls, small populated nuclei, and Santuari (Sanctuaries). Even though walking along the path in a single day is possible, we recommended splitting the walk into stages.

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Adobe Stock Image Rocky coast near Riomaggiore with the Love Road (Via dell'Amore) in Cinque Terre, Italy.

Sanctuary Trail

Halfway up the hill corresponds a Santuario (Sanctuary); the locals are tied to each Cinque Terre village by their deep devotion. Five churches linked to their respective villages by steep mule tracks; believers still use these routes today during annual festivals. The Via dei Santuari (road of the Sanctuaries) is of great historical interest; its horizontal route unites all five buildings of worship. This historical path can be completed on foot, horseback, or bicycle. It provides incomparable views of the

Cinque Terre and exceptional historical and spiritual reflection opportunities. A simple route is doable for anyone and can be split up into stages.



Walking the Cinque Terre Trail

Do I need a permit?

YES! You need a Cinque Terre Card to walk the coast path from Monterosso to Corniglia. They can be purchased in the villages, train stations, and huts at the start of each section of the path. You don't need a permit to walk between Corniglia and Riomaggiore via the hill path.

Best Time to Visit the Cinque Terre



The best time to visit Cinque Terre depends on whether you want to hike, swim, or go sightseeing. Summer is the warmest time to swim at the beach.

The downside is that the Cinque Terre is busiest in July and August. The Italian sun can be intense then, and hiking in that heat is rough. Then there's the fact that many things close down in August when Italians go on holiday.

It's best to visit Cinque Terre in the shoulder season months of April, May, and September for comfortable weather and good hiking conditions.

Plan for the rain

In a rugged stretch of coastline lies Cinque Terre, a picturesque area nestled near the mountains. Unfortunately, its location also makes it susceptible to natural disasters, with rockfalls and landslides occurring frequently. On 25 October 2011, heavy rainfall led to devastating floods and mudslides in Cinque Terre. This tragic event resulted in the loss of nine lives and caused severe damage to the villages, particularly Vernazza and Monterosso. Today, you can still see the lasting impact of this disaster in these villages.

During our two visits, the sea was quite rough, and we experienced frequent rainfall, making rain gear essential in this area. The ferry service between the villages was canceled, and the walking trails alongside the ocean were also closed. Although we had some pleasant weather on most days, the unpredictable nature of the sea did impact our visit.

Sustainability and preserving the magic of Cinque Terre



Some people have blamed the increasing occurrence of these weather events on the massive tourist traffic. It is estimated that 2.5 million people use the trails alone every year, which damages the environment. The trails can become unstable, leading to unsafe conditions and frequent trail closures. They were closed on both visits, which wasn't an issue since that was not part of our itinerary.

The locals understand the importance of tourism to their community. But what has drawn criticism from the locals is the cruise ship visitors. The mass volumes of people a cruise ship drops on an area are problematic; in Cinque Terre, it must be a nightmare. These cruise people swarm the villages for a few hours, not contributing much to the local economy. They were expected to shop and eat, but that has not been the case. There are efforts to ban cruise ships or limit them. Something needs to be done to protect this fragile area. Venice has banned large cruise ships; maybe Cinque Terre can learn from that. There is also talk of capping tourists, but that is only in the talking phases, and it seems it would be nearly impossible to implement except for the cruise ships.

Cruise impact and how to avoid it

If you stay a couple of days, look at the [cruise schedules](#). Avoid the days these ships dump tons of people into these tiny towns. The ships dock in La Spezia, and passengers are brought in. July and August are the busiest months for cruise traffic. The times they tend to visit are between 10 am to 4 pm.

Summer, by default, brings many people to Cinque Terre. Both our visits were in the Fall. If you can visit during the off-season, that is ideal. However, one part that can make a difference is staying in the area. Most tourists are day visitors. If you head out early morning vs late afternoon and evening, your experience will be very different. It was also when Manarola felt so authentic and genuine.

How to get to Cinque Terre



Situated on Italy's western coast in Liguria, Cinque Terre is roughly halfway between the cities of Genoa and Pisa. As far as the closest airports go, flying to Pisa or Genoa is your best bet. Both airports cater to many domestic and international destinations, although Pisa has a larger airport.

Once in Italy, the best way to travel to Cinque Terre is by train. To reach the Cinque Terre by train, you first must get to the town of Levanto along the coast to the north or the city of La Spezia to the east. These two places bookend the five villages of the Cinque Terre and are the last stops at either end of the Cinque Terre's local milk run train. La Spezia is the only city in the area that acts as a regional hub.

Train travel is a popular way to get around Italy, and if you need seat reservations on the Le Frecce and Intercity trains, it's **best to book in advance** [using this link](#). Wait too late, especially in the summer, and all the seats may be gone. The other way is with the slower regional trains, which don't have seat reservations.

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Arriving by car

Seeing the Cinque Terre by car comes with some complications. Although it may be a fun and scenic drive for some, the roads throughout the national park are windy and quite challenging. It can also be awful for people who get car sick. They are only wide enough for a single vehicle in many places, so you'll need to drive with caution and take it slow.

Once you've arrived in a village, only local cars may enter, if any at all. You will need to park in the lots

at the top of the villages. Each car park has its own hourly or daily rates ranging from 15€ to 25€ per day. We suggest parking in La Spezia or Levanto, which is usually less expensive, and you can take the train there.

Distance between Cinque Terre and other Italian cities by train:

Genoa ? Cinque Terre 1,5 hours
Pisa ? Cinque Terre 1,5 hours
Florence – Cinque Terre 3 hours
Milan ? Cinque Terre 4 hours
Rome ? Cinque Terre 5 hours
Venice ? Cinque Terre 6 hours

How to get around Cinque Terre

By Train

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A regular regional train runs from La Spezia to Levanto and stops at each of the five villages. It takes 30 minutes to travel end to end. The more exciting and enjoyable way to explore Cinque Terre is to take the scenic railway that links the five villages. Traveling from one town to the next takes about five minutes.

Each of the five towns in the Cinque Terre has a train station, and although faster trains coming into the area don't necessarily stop at each one, there are slower trains that stop at each town. These are referred to as "milk-run" trains because they stop frequently. You may feel sluggish, but getting from the first to the fifth village takes less than 15 minutes. Beware of pickpockets; we learned that the hard way. Check out the shadow box at the end of this article to learn how our milk run train led to our first and only experience with a pickpocket in years of travel.

Cinque Terre Train Pass

Working out the best train ticket will depend on how much you plan to take the train in the Cinque Terre. If you plan to go everywhere by train, consider buying the one or two-day Cinque Terre Card Treno at any station for unlimited train travel. Otherwise, look at individual trip tickets, as they may be cheaper.

The train is undoubtedly the most comfortable way to visit the Cinque Terre and the Ligurian Riviera. At each station, you'll find the National Park's information offices, where you can get tourist information and purchase the [Cinque Terre Card](#), a special card issued by the National Park.

By Boat



Not the boat you would take

If you prefer to visit Cinque Terre by boat, you're lucky, as ferry services link the villages with neighboring Levanto and Portovenere. Although the train is more expensive, a cheaper option is to take one boat trip between villages. Ferry timetables, routes, and costs can be found [here](#).

The one risk with boats is that they are weather-permitting. The Ligurian Sea is rough, and the ferries are often canceled. During both our visits, they were not running.

Where to stay in Cinque Terre?



All five villages have accommodations. How you choose will depend on how you prefer to travel. Monterosso may meet your needs if you are more into fancy hotels, pools, and resort-type experiences. The other villages will suit you better if you want a more traditional and authentic experience. Our top recommendation is Manarola. Either a hotel or a vacation rental would work well here. Rick Steves, whom we are huge fans of, adores Vernazza. Below are links that will provide both hotel and vacation rentals.

It is important to price out accommodations on various sites. [Expedia](#) is a US-based company, whereas [Booking.com](#) is Europe-based. Not all properties appear on both, so it is ideal to check both out. Our personal first choice is [Booking.com](#). If the establishment has a website, check the price there as well. Click the link below to check out hotels and vacation homes in the area. It may be just the motivation you need to start planning that next grand adventure.

[BOOK NOW](#)

Where to dine in Cinque Terre



Besides all there is to see, Cinque Terre is just as much about the food and wine. You get to enjoy the regional Ligurian cuisine that favors seafood and pesto. Cinque Terre is famous for its fresh seafood. Anchovies are staples, and they are nothing like you imagine. Fresh from the sea makes all the difference. The seafood pasta is the best we have had anywhere. Fun street food you'll find in many places is a seafood cone full of assorted seafood to munch on as you walk.



With so many vineyards, it's little surprise that local wine is on the menu. The wine produced in the Cinque Terre is primarily white wine, with the local specialty being Sciacchetra, a sweet dessert wine. Ending the meal with the local limoncino would be an excellent way to cap off your evening.

We had four favorite restaurants in Manarola.



Trattoria Dal Billy This place is remarkable at the top of Manarola, with stunning views and sunsets. Some will find the climb challenging, so reservations are a must. It is by far our favorite place.

Il Porticciolo Is a local favorite with excellent food.

Trattoria La Scogliera Is Popular and is excellent food.

Marina Piccola This restaurant often has poor reviews, but we enjoyed our meals here.

If you are used to Italy and its reasonable prices for food and beverages, you will find that is not the case in Cinque Terre. It can be pricey here.

Reflection



The magic and dramatic beauty of Cinque Terre have a way of staying with you long after you leave. Even after two visits, we are anxious to return, and we don't say that about that many places. It honestly captures your heart and soul.

If you want to do these villages right, stay a few days. A day visit may only disappoint. It deserves that time. Cinque Terre is that one-of-a-kind place that should be on everyone's bucket list. If you go, do it right and get to know the kind-hearted locals, take in the magnificent scenery, eat delicious food, hike the stunning extensive hiking trails, and sample the excellent wine. You will soon discover a piece of your heart was left in Cinque Terre, and you will be drawn back to visit again and again.

Perfection comes with bumps in the road

Lessons learned the hard way



It sounds like everything was flawless during our time in Cinque Terre. That is not quite the case. On our first day visiting the villages, we took the milk run train to each town. It was a packed station that

morning with tons of tourists. As the train approached, the skies opened up. It was chaotic as everyone tried to board the train to get out of the pouring rain. Relief on the train soon turned into shock when Joelle's wallet was gone. It was the first time in all our travels that, knock on wood, a pickpocket got us. It was carelessness on our part, but that was not the first consideration in the rush to get on the train. Joelle had all her credit cards in that stolen wallet to add salt to the wound.

In search of the wallet

We got off at the next station, and the ticket agent called the previous one to see if a wallet had been turned in. It had not. The choice was to agonize over it or move on, so we moved on and went on to have a wonderful day. There is no reason to spoil the day; it can't change what happened and only gives the thief the win. Shit happens as it is said, and we weren't going to let it ruin our memories. Over the years, it has become part of the adventure when we tell the story.

Later, when we returned to the station where the theft occurred, we asked the attendant if a wallet had been turned in. He produced a box full of wallets and many passports, but not our missing one. That was eye-opening. They told us the thieves usually grab the cash and maybe some cards, then dump the remains.

Being prepared for these unpleasant situations

We always make several copies of our documents and cards to have with us and leave one at home with family. When this occurred, it was before we had cell phones that had international calling capabilities. After a quick call home to Joelle's husband, he pulled out the papers she had left, made calls, and had all the cards canceled and reordered. The Chase Sapphire Reserve card offers replacement within 48 hours from almost anywhere you are in the world. We gave them our following address in Monaco, and the new card was there in short order. Luckily, most of our cash and passports were back in the apartment. There was never any attempt to use the cards that were stolen.

This experience was a good lesson. Always separate cards and remove anything you don't need that day from your wallet. Our backpacks are now locked and theft-proof. Check out our favorite backpack on our [Recommend Travel Gear and Accessories](#) list. Joelle has been using the same Travelon Backpack since.

Check out the [official tourism site for Cinque Terre, Italy](#)



Manarola, Cinque Terra, Italy

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