

## Tuscany & Cinque Terre, Italy – September/October 2022

This trip was the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of a 3-week trip to Europe ... the 1<sup>st</sup> half was spent in Provence, France (see separate write-up). When we were planning the trip, we looked at various options for getting ourselves from Marseilles, France to Florence, Italy – car, train, and plane – we decided flying made the most sense for our needs so that's what we did (we had a flight change in Paris). The Florence airport is close to the city center (about a 15 min cab ride) and is rather small – our 737 had to really slam on the brakes upon touchdown on the one & only runway. This was Steve's first visit to Florence and my second – my first visit was way back in 1977 when I backpacked Europe with 2 girlfriends. The plan was to spend a little bit of time in Florence and then meet up with a group of fellow travelers for a 9-day Mountain Travel Sobek *Italy Tuscany & Cinque Terre Walking* tour.

### Florence (3 nights)

After checking into our hotel, the *Hotel Executive* in the late afternoon, we were ready for some food and a welcome to Florence drink. Fortunately, just across the street from the hotel was the *Caf  Pasticceria Gamberini*, which based on the crowd looked promising, and indeed was! For the price of a drink each, we were also served a "tower" of finger foods as well as some additional plates/bowls of bite-sized pieces – needless to say, our dinner needs were taken care of ☺.



Steve and our "free" tower of goodies at the *Caf  Pasticceria Gamberini*

The next morning, we met up with Valentina, a *Tours by Local* guide, who took us on a 3-hour walking tour of the city (no jokes about "3-hour tours" please!) Valentina was a fountain of information on the city's history, architecture, culture, etc. and had lots of good suggestions/advice for things to do, place to eat, etc. It was a great way to get a good overview of the city and we walked several miles with her.

One of the fun things she pointed out were the very clever traffic sign "stickers" done by the artist *Clet Abraham*, who has a studio in Florence – once she pointed them out, we saw them all over ...

Some of the many Clet Abraham stickers we saw in Florence



Our walking tour took us along the river *Arno* and then across its famous medieval stone *Ponte Vecchio* (or *Old Bridge*) noted for the shops built along it; it was the only bridge in Florence spared from destruction during WWII. Now it is a bottleneck of tourists! One other feature of the bridge is the *Corridoio Varsariano* (or *Vasari Corridor*). It was built in 1565 by the *Medici* family so that they could make the 1km walk from their home in the *Palazzo Pitti* (they moved there in 1549 from the *Palazzo Vecchio*) to their offices in the *Uffizi* building without getting wet or mixing with the riff-raff. For those who have watched the mini-series "Medici" or who are otherwise familiar with this famed family know, the history of Florence and the Medici's are very strongly intertwined. We walked past the *Piazza Santa Croce* with its *Basilica di Santa*



Croce (built 1294-1442) where Michelangelo, Galileo, and others are buried. The *Piazza del Signoria*, on which the *Palazzo Vecchio* sits, includes many must-see sights including a copy of Michelangelo's *David*, and the *Loggia del Lanzi*, which is effectively an open-air sculpture gallery containing such famous works as Cellini's bronze statue of *Perseus* (completed in 1545) and Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabine Women*, made from the single largest block of white marble ever brought to Florence – it has been in the *Loggia* since 1583. It seems that around every corner in Florence is another magnificent building (many connected to Florence's famous Medici family) or plaza. When we reached the *Duomo di Firenze* (Florence Cathedral) we found its plaza overstuffed with milling tourists and tour groups – my first thought was “get me out of here.” Fortunately, our time with Valentina had come to an end so Steve & I could escape for a lunch break before we returned for the afternoon of “doing” the Duomo.



*Ponte Vecchio – stuffed full of jewelry shops and tourists!*

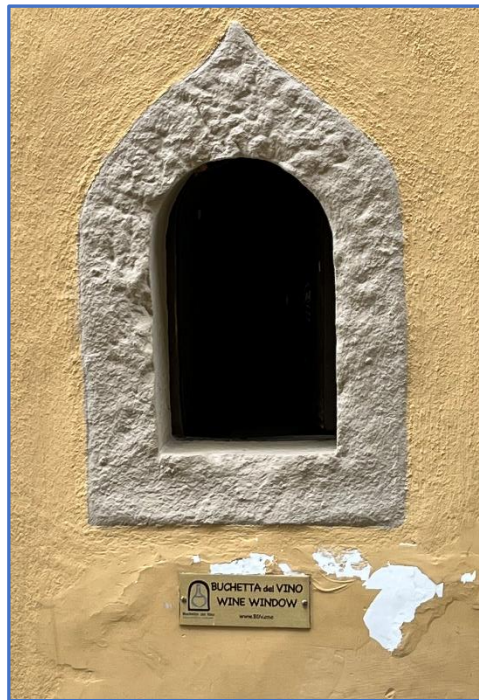


*Fountain of Neptune - commissioned by Cosimo I de' Medici in 1559*



*Atop the Duomo's rooftop terrace on our way up to the dome's bell tower*

After lunch we joined a “skip the line” tour at the Duomo. A brief tour of



*Florence's “Wine Windows” allowed wine to be sold without opening a shop (and thus avoid paying taxes). They also come in handy in limiting human contact during the 1630-33 bubonic plague period (and more recently during the COVID19 pandemic)!*

the cathedral's interior was followed by the main event: climbing the 463 steps to the top of the Brunelleschi-designed double dome. Built between 1420 and 1426, it remains the largest masonry dome in the world. The first 150 steps took us to a terrace atop the main cathedral before continuing upward via spiral staircases and eventually iron ladders

located *between* the actual 2 domes which deposited us atop the dome's bell tower. There, we had a wonderful 360- degree view of Florence ... well worth the effort! What goes up, must come down so after enjoying the views, we stepped our way back down. On the way down, we got a up close view of the spectacular “Last Judgement” fresco painted by Giorgio Vasari in 1572. Before leaving the Duomo complex, we popped into the octagonal green & white marble *Baptistry of St. John* to check out its incredible bronze doors and stunning gold mosaic ceiling (done in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries).



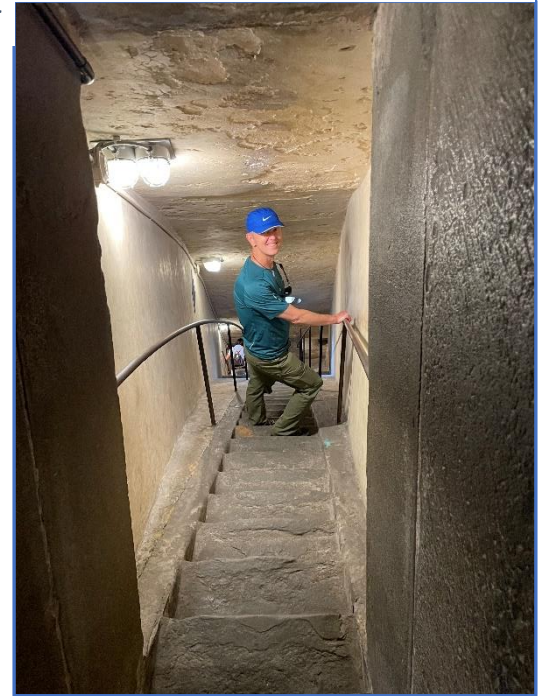


*Enjoying the view atop of Duomo after 463 steps*

*Melissa going up between the dome layers .... Steve going down between the dome layers ...*



*Stunning gold mosaic ceiling of the Baptistry of St. John*



A well-earned gelato capped off our afternoon's adventures (gelato was invented in Florence)! We took a roundabout return stroll to our hotel in order to do some window shopping in Florence's area of high-end designer shops. A casual, locals-type place near our hotel fed us well at dinnertime. We figured we walked about 11 miles that day!

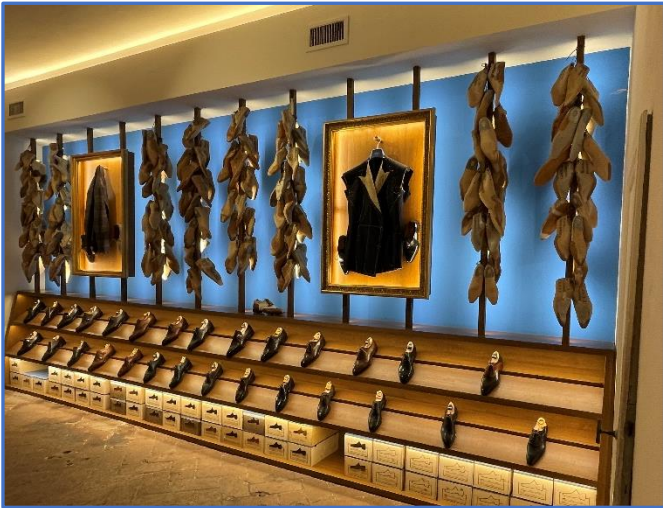
With 9am tickets to the *Uffizi Gallery*, we were up and out promptly the next morning. After doing a whirlwind viewing of this museum's outstanding Renaissance collection (we basically hit the high points and speed-walked the rest), we escaped the thousands of painted eyeballs staring down at us and headed across the river. We strolled past a shoemaking school (hundreds of wooden shoe forms hung from its walls) and stopped into a neighborhood bar for a mid-morning hot chocolate and muffin. Appropriately fortified, we continued the easy climb up to Florence's *Piazzale Michelangelo* which is known for its great views of Florence's skyline (the plaza wasn't there in Michelangelo's time as it was built in 1869).



We then wandered our way back down the hill via the paths of Florence's *Giardino delle Rose* (Rose Garden) and through some local neighborhoods before working our way back to the Ponte Vecchio to cross back across the river. Not far from our hotel, we stopped at a hole-in-the-wall bakery (which had a good line of locals waiting to get in) and picked up a couple of very tasty focaccias, a large raisin roll and a couple of bottled drinks – all for only 8 Euro (less than \$8 at the time). Our mileage for the day: 8 ½ miles.



*View of Florence from Piazzale Michelangelo*



*Wooden shoe forms at Shoemaking School*



*Steve smelling the roses in the Giardino delle Rose*



*Fabulous brass doorbells on Florence apartment building*



*Melissa enjoying some of the many blossoms in the Giardino delle Rose despite a light drizzle*



Day 1 of MT Sobek Trip: In the mid-afternoon we met up with our Mountain Travel Sobek *Italy Tuscany and Cinque Terre Walking* group for the start of a 9-day trip. After a short orientation and meet-n-greet session, the twelve of us piled into 2 vans driven by our guides for the trip, Silvia and Marco. Besides Steve & I, our group consisted of:

- Pat & Maurice, a couple from Macon, GA
- Gayla & Mike, a couple from Purcellville, VA
- Barbara & Mike, a couple from Pinehurst, NC
- Lee & Chuck, a couple from Alexandria, VA (and friends of Gayla & Mike)
- Judy & Leonie, a mother & daughter from Placerville & El Dorado Hills, CA

Not far from the city center and the American Cemetery from WWII, we stopped to see the *Basilica di San Miniato* which sits atop one of the highest points in the city and has been described as one of the finest Romanesque architectural structures in Tuscany (period of 1000 – 1150 AD, Basilica opened in 1018). Our evening destination was the home of Silvio and wife Anna, he a native of Italy and she an American who met Silvio while studying in Florence. They hosted our group for some olive oil tasting (their property includes olive trees) followed by a home-cooked country-style meal by Anna of chicken, white beans, salad, and dessert ... and, of course, wine. We returned to Florence for a final night there before heading out to explore parts of Tuscany.



*Basilica di San Miniato (not our pix)*



*The 20 regions of Italy*

Tuscany is one of 20 administrative regions in Italy, with Florence as its capital city. In turn, the region of Tuscany is divided into 10 provinces.



*The 10 provinces of Tuscany*

Over the course of the next few days, we will travel from the province of Firenze (Florence) through parts of the provinces of Sienna, Pisa, Lucca, and Massa-Carrara before leaving the Tuscany region and ending up in the *Liguria* region.



## **Radda in Chianti (2 nights)**

**Day 2 of MTS Trip – Chianti Wines & Walks:** With ourselves and our luggage piled into 2 vans, we head south east out of Florence to the village of *Greve*, the wine capital of the Chianti area. Following a hot beverage in Greve, we hike up through the surrounding forest of chestnut trees to the hilltop village of *Lamole*. There we enjoyed lunch (fresh burrata & tomato bruschetta – yum) before continuing on foot to *Volpaia*, a medieval hamlet famed for its Chianti Classico wine. A short drive away is our hotel for 2 nights, the *Hotel Palazzo Leopoldo* in the quaint town of Radda. Dinner that night is in the hotel and delicious and abundant. Total day's hiking: 6.5 miles with 1300' vertical.



*Overcast skies didn't take much away from the classic Tuscany scenery*



*Hiking path near Greve*



*Tenute Selvolini Winery in Volpaia*

*Chianti Classico wine must adhere to specific rules. Its blend is 80% of Sangiovese, the red grape typical of the area, 20% of other grapes which can include other native grapes such as Canaiolo and Colorino, as well as other international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Its characteristics are a limpid ruby red color, floral notes for its odor and a harmonious, dry and sapid flavor with a good level of tannin. The minimum alcohol level should be 12 percent.*



Day 3 of MTS Trip – Tuscany Views & Vittles: From the hotel we have a short drive to the start of a 4.5-mile hike to the village of *Panzano*, yet another charming hilltop village. In Panzano, we visit the butcher shop where they are cutting, by hand, the huge steaks known as *Steak Florentine* (bistecca alla fiorentina) and wander about the charming village.



*Countryside near Panzano – stereotypical Tuscany with rolling hills, vineyards, olive groves, cypress trees, and hilltop stone castles*



*Steve hiking into Panzano*



*Panzano butcher shop & butcher hand cutting huge Steak Florentine pieces*



From Panzano, we hop back into the vans for a short ride to a home/working farm where we are treated to a marvelous rustic lunch (including cured meats, cheese, fresh bread, pasta w/ baby zucchini, fresh sliced tomatoes and sweet dessert wine) prepared by the homeowners beneath a trellis of drying grapes.

*Steve getting ready for our lunch feast*





*Elements of our lunch*



*View from our lunch table*



*Melissa admiring the drying grapes from which the sweet dessert wine was made*

After a very leisurely lunch, we drive back our hotel in Radda just before a heavy thunderstorm hits (complete with heavy rain and even small hail). We're on our own for the rest of the day/evening so I fit in a massage before Steve and I have a very light dinner (2 fresh sandwiches and

beverages for 8.50 Euro). Total day's hiking: 4.6 miles, approx. 400' vertical.

### **Poggibonsi** (2 nights)

Day 4 of MTS Trip – Exploring Siena: The rain of the previous evening continued as we depart Radda and head south/southwest to the city of *Siena*. Siena is known for its medieval brick buildings and its UNESCO-listed historic center including its fan-shaped central square, the *Piazza del Campo*. From this square, the city's 17 historic districts extend outward and play an instrumental part in the twice yearly *Palio*, a crazy horse race started in 1633 (there is a great Netflix documentary called "Palio" which provides a wonderful look at this tradition).

A local tour guide walks us through the city providing informational tidbits on its history, culture, etc.. The impressive black & white marble façade of the *Duomo di Siena* (Siena Cathedral) welcomes us to one of the main reasons to visit Siena. We were very fortunate to see the cathedral's intricate inlaid mosaic marble floors from the 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century which feature scenes from



*Each of the 17 districts in Siena are identified by a symbol, the rampant ram is that of the Valdimontone district*





*The stunning white & black marble clad medieval Duomo di Siena on a rainy day*

the Old Testament -- there are 56 such panels, most in their original condition which are only uncovered for viewing during a few weeks each year.



*Just a sampling of the amazing mosaic marble floors of Duomo di Siena*



*The level of decoration within the Duomo di Siena is just mindboggling*

After touring the overwhelmingly decorated Siena Cathedral, we are on our own for a couple hours to grab some lunch, wander about the city, etc. Some delicious hot chocolate helps offset the rainy weather.

From Siena we have a short drive to *Poggibonsi* and our hotel for the next 2 nights, *Hotel Villa San Lucchese*, which is housed in a 15<sup>th</sup> century villa. Before dinner, and between rain showers, Steve & I walk to a nearby archeological park and explore a walled fortress from the 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. For dinner, the group enjoys a festive meal (with lots of vino) at the hotel. Today's mileage: 6 miles with 445' vertical

Day 5 of MTS Trip – Hike to San Gimignano: After a filling breakfast, the picturesque town of *Colle Val d'Elsa* is just a short drive away. Known for its fine Italian crystal glass production, we explore its small crystal museum and enjoy a stroll through its charming streets.

We then hike directly out of the town, via trails, toward the town of *San Gimignano*. We enjoy a hearty lunch before continuing our hike towards the town's 13<sup>th</sup> century wall. Colorful blooming crocus and boar hunters (and their dogs) add to the day's experience.

*San Gimignano*, a UNESCO World Heritage site is sometimes called the "medieval Manhattan" due to its striking skyline ... 14 of its original 72 tower houses from the 11<sup>th</sup> century remain, including 2 matching ones dubbed the "Twin Towers." Once in town, we have some free time to explore – we find the town stuffed with tourists and shops selling Italian goods to said tourists (I do admit to purchasing a thimble there). We gladly escape the crowds for a final night in *Poggibonsi*. Total day's hiking: 8.8 miles and 1275' vertical



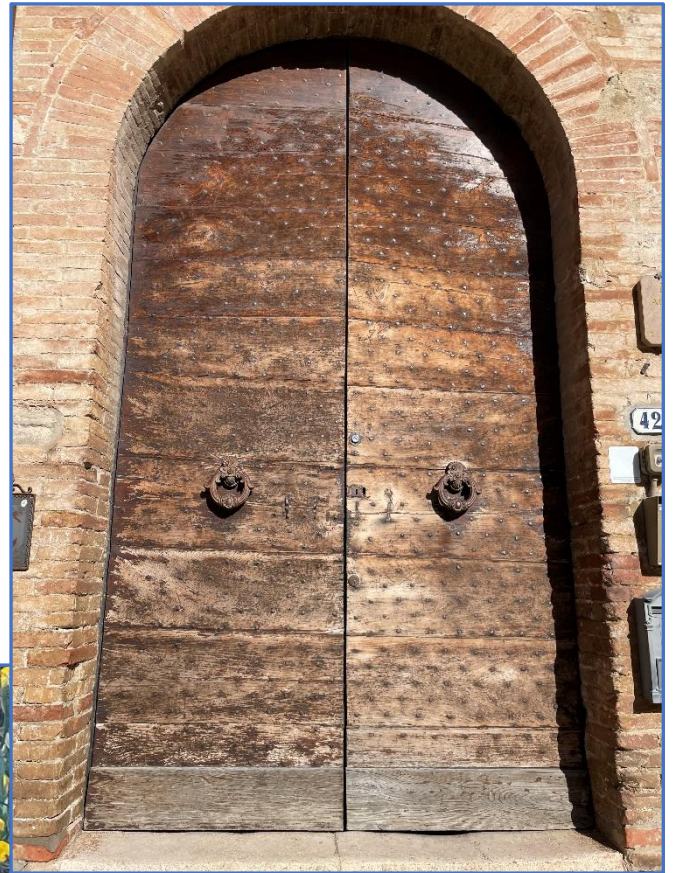
*Cat atop a lamp post & sunny blue skies greeted us at our hotel on the morning of Day 5 of the MTS trip*





*Steve looking out over town of Colle Val d'Elsa*

*Huge iron-studded wood doors in Colle Val d'Elsa*



*Cheerful crocus along the trail between Colle Val d'Elsa and San Gimignano*

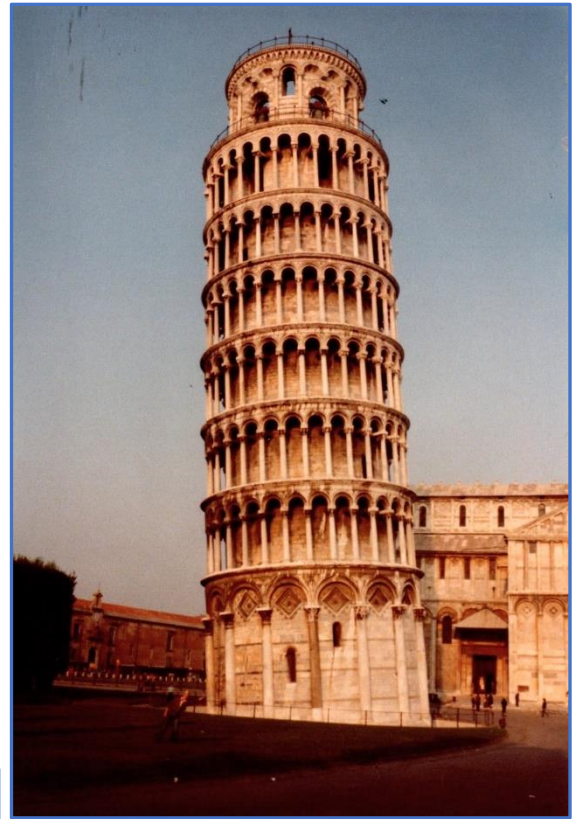


*San Gimignano's impressive skyline as we approach it hiking*



## Cinque Terre/Levanto (3 nights)

Day 6 of MTS Trip – Visit Carrara and Arrive at the Italian Riviera: This morning we head north in the vans for a drive that takes us out of *Tuscany* and eventually into the administrative region of *Liguria*. While still in Tuscany, we pass through the city of *Pisa*, famous for its “leaning tower.” I visited it in 1977 while backpacking after college. North from Pisa, we follow the coastline to the town of *Carrara*, famous for its white Carrara marble. The Romans started quarrying the stone here somewhere around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. According to Wikipedia, more marble has been extracted from the over 650 quarry sites near Carrara than from any other place in the world. This level of stone extraction has not been kind to the environment with large areas now left in ruins. Apparently, now there are lots of regulations and various protection measures in place to help limit future damage. We take a tour of one of the marble quarries in Range Rovers which easily navigate the steep inclines and tight turns needed to view the quarry operations. These days, synthetic diamond wire cutters, pneumatic drills and very large machinery is used to cut the marble into slabs – a far cry from the manual saws and pounded in wedges used in centuries past.



*Melissa (lower left) in 1977 “holding up” the Leaning*

*It is hard to get a good sense of the scale of the marble quarry but a comparison of vehicles & machinery being used to the stone mountain gives some idea*

*Note: the tour experience is definitely a good one but know you’ll end up covered in fine marble dust 😊*

*There were moments of “Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride” as the tour vehicles took us up the mountain and then back down!*



We ate a nice lunch at a restaurant right at the base of the quarry (which just happened to be across the street from several marble shops – given the weight of marble, I only brought only a small sphere). Our lunch included generous helpings of thin bread slices topped with “lardo” (pork fatback which has been cured in salt with herbs and spices such as rosemary and pepper) – it may sound a bit icky but it was actually quite delicious!





Our drive then continued north, mostly along Italy's western coastline to the seaside town of *Levanto*. There we settled into our home for the next three nights, the family-run *Hotel La Giada del Mesco*, which sits high in the hills overlooking the *Ligurian Sea* (an arm of the Mediterranean Sea along which the "Italian Riviera" sits). A steep footpath took us back down into town where a tasty and very abundant dinner had us soon ready to call it a night! Total day's walking: 1.5 miles



*Italy is a very dog friendly place – they are allowed in most restaurants – this one was seated (in his owner's lap) at the table next to us at dinner*



*Sunset on the Ligurian Sea in Levanto*



*The Cinque Terre (Five Lands) Villages*

Day 7 of MTS Trip – Begin Exploration of Cinque Terre: The opportunity to visit the *Cinque Terre* area is one of the key reasons we chose this trip. The UNESCO-listed *Cinque Terre*, or "Five Lands" is a series of centuries-old seaside villages along the rugged Italia Riviera coastline. North to south they are: *Monterosso al Mare*, *Vernazza*, *Corniglia*, *Manarola*, and *Riomaggiore*. Until a railroad in 1874 linked the five villages with the outside world, they were only accessible by foot or by boat.

After fortifying ourselves at the hotel's breakfast buffet, our group headed out right from the hotel towards *Monterosso al Mare*, the northern-most and largest of the 5 villages that make up *Cinque Terre*. Following a rocky coastline trail, high above the turquoise waves, we enjoyed expansive views under warm & sunny blue skies. Fellow hiker Mike discovered that bringing along 2 small cap-topped glass bottles of tonic water to drink were difficult to open without a bottle opener! Blooming oleanders and bougainvillea added to the colors of the landscape. From a promontory, we enjoyed our first views of Monterosso ... its long sandy beach makes it a popular destination for beach goers. The village is divided into "new town" and "old town" areas; these are separated by the small hill topped with the 16<sup>th</sup> century *Aurora Tower*. The two areas are connected via a pedestrian tunnel and a stair-cased walkway which leads up



*Monterosso al Mare seen from above on the hike into the village from the north*



and around the rocky hill upon which sits the Aurora Tower. A German-built WWII turret sits below the tower and was apparently never used.

The group splits to wander Monterosso at will ... Steve and I wander down to the old town area via the over-the-hill walkway. As we're on our own for lunch, we dine al fresco at one of the many, many cafes in the old town. Eventually we return back to the new town area, via the very-crowded tunnel, and make our way to the train station (with a gelato stop of course!) to meet up with our group for the journey back to Levanto via train. Back at our hotel, we toast the sunset with Aperol Spritz's on the patio before chowing down on made-to-order pizzas delivered right to the hotel. Today's miles: 7.8 with 870' vertical



*Looking northwards from the old town part of Monterosso del Mare*



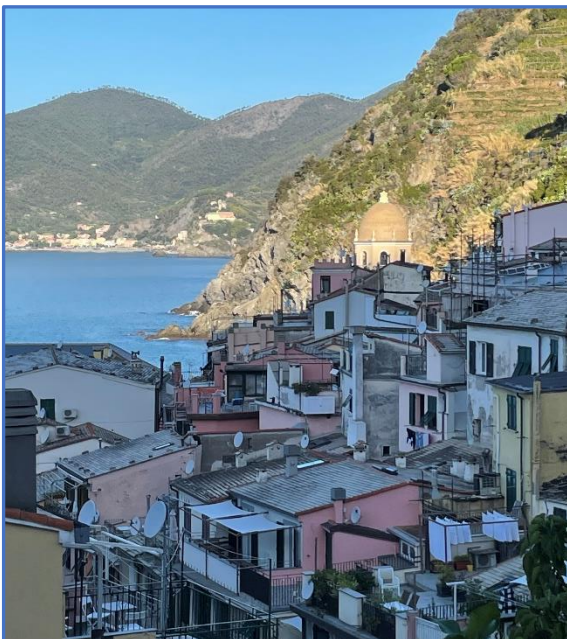
*Walkway from new town to old town Monterosso*



*The new town area of Monterosso del Mare – notice the arched train bridge going right through the colorful town alongside the beach*

Day 8 of MTS Trip – Exploring the rest of Cinque Terre: We're back at the Levanto train station to catch the 8am train to *Vernazza*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> most northern of the villages. We take some

time to explore this village, including its 14<sup>th</sup> century *Santa Margherita di Antiochia*, a marble filled church, and wonder what efforts must have gone into getting all the needed marble from Carrara to the village.



*The very colorful and very vertical town of Vernazza*

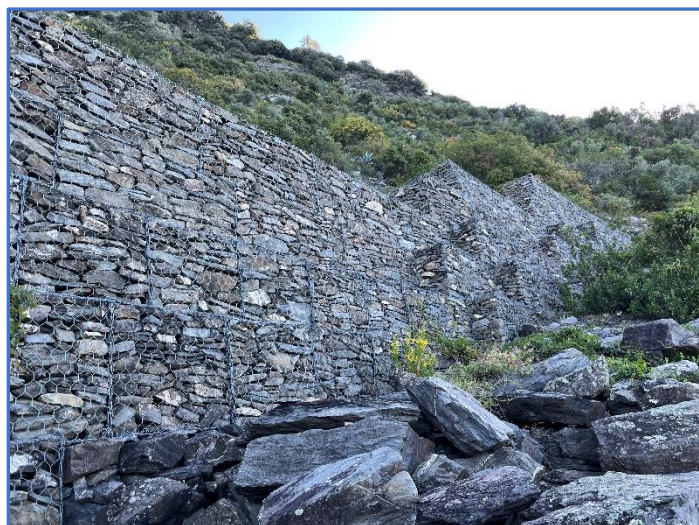






*Intrepid hikers in Vernazza: Maurice, Pat, Steve, Melissa, Chuck, Lee, Mike, Gayla, Mike & Barb (Judy and Leonie took the day off from hiking)*

Via rocky steps and along terraced olive groves, we hike from *Vernazza* to the next village to the south, *Corniglia*. To do so, we enter the *Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre* (a small entry fee is needed). This park, at 4300 acres is the smallest of Italy's National Parks and was only established in 1999.



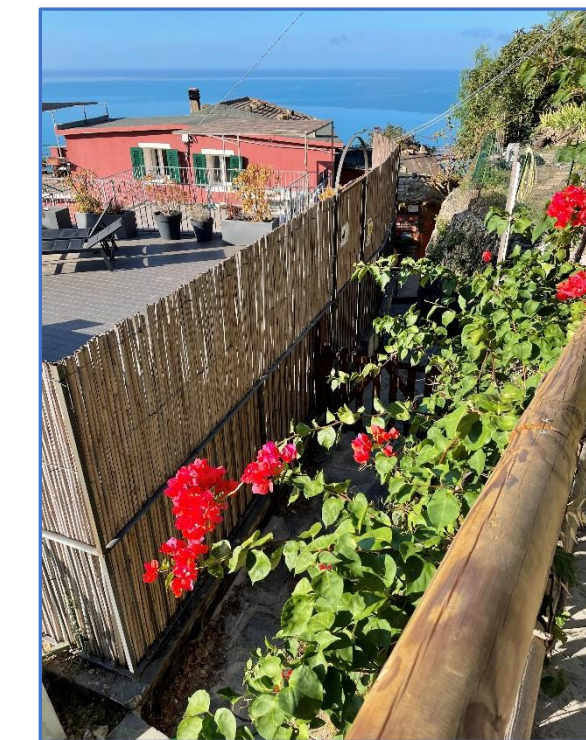
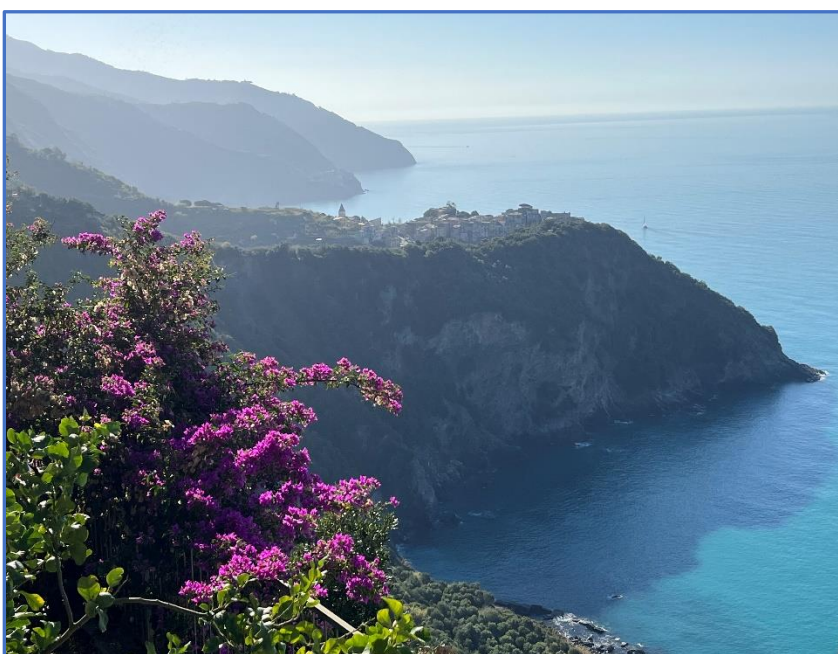
The hike steeply climbs alongside retaining walls, olive groves, and hillside-hugging cottages before turning downward a bit so we enter *Corniglia* from above. Unlike the other *Cinque Terre* villages, *Corniglia*, does not sit seaside, but instead sits atop a 300' high promontory surrounded on three sides by vineyards and terraces.

*Amazing retaining walls alongside the trail*





*Nets below olives trees are used to catch the falling fruit during harvest*



*A hillside hugging cottage alongside the trail between Vernazza and Corniglia*

*Looking down at the village of Cornigliam Vernazza*

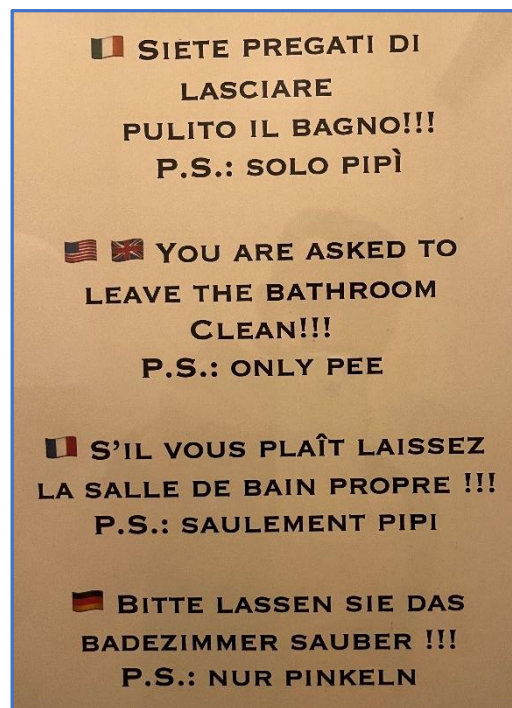
In *Corniglia*, Steve and I take a short “technical break” (i.e., purchased a couple of Coke Zeros at a local café so that we can use their WC) while we await the rest of the group to catch up.

Once all in the group were reassembled and appropriately set (i.e., all had their own versions of a technical break), the morning’s hike continued onward to the next village of *Manarola*. The trail took us up a series of steep



rocky stairs and then along and through terraced vineyards overlooking the sea. Past generations had brought in soil by hand to facilitate the growing of grapes & other produce in an otherwise rocky terrain. We knew we had arrived in the upper reaches of *Manarola* when we arrived at the *Chiesa di San Lorenzo*, a Gothic-Romanesque church built in 1375. There we waited, under a shady tree, for the rest of the group to catch up.

*Friendly feline outside Chiesa di San Lorenzo*



*Sign in café's WC in Corniglia*





*View from the trail between Corniglia and Manarola*



*Steve on the trail between Corniglia and Manarola*



*Terraced vineyards in Manarola*

After the morning's 2000' of vertical gain under very warm and sunny skies, we were all ready to enjoy a tasty lunch at a nearby family-run restaurant and enjoy a cool beverage or two. Following lunch (where one of the Mike's drank nearly 5 liters of sparkling water as he was so thirsty), we hiked down into the seaside portion of *Manarola* where I purchased another pair of my favorite La Sportiva shoes (Helios III, so light weight & comfortable). A very quick train ride took us from *Manarola* to *Riomaggiore*, the fifth village (the trail between to these 2 villages had been closed for some time due to landslide damage so we had no option of taking it).

In *Riomaggiore* we were met by hordes of fellow tourists crowding its narrow streets. Steve and I figured the best way to deal with the claustrophobic conditions was to "get a drink" and so we spotted a café with

outdoor seating and did just that. Frankly it is hard to enjoy the charm of this seaside village when hemmed in on all sides by people 🙄. We ended up chatting with a young honeymooning couple -- it was their first trip out of the US and we enjoyed their wide-eyed wonder 😊



*Wall-to-wall tourists awaited us in Riomaggiore*



For our return to *Monterosso al Mare*, we took the water taxi instead of the train. It was a wonderful way to view the fascinating terrain and villages we had mostly hiked through during the last 2 days. A final trip on the train from *Monterosso al Mare* returned us to *Levanto*. After cleaning up at our hotel, the group enjoyed a scrumptious farewell dinner in town and toasted our experiences and memories made in Tuscany and Cinque Terre. Today's miles: 8.2 miles with 2000' vertical.

Day 9 of MTS Trip – The Group Scatters: After a final breakfast together, the group is scatters in various directions. Steve & I are picked up and driven to the airport in *Genoa*. Our driver must have been a former race car driver as he certainly liked to exceed the posted speed limits and got us to the airport way earlier than we'd expected. There, after much delay, we finally boarded our flight into Munich, Germany. Unfortunately, the flight delay out of Genoa

caused us to land just as our next flight to Denver is taking off; thus, we missed the flight. I quickly contacted United Airlines and they were able to book us on flights the next day. Fortunately, Munich airport has a very convenient and nicely appointed Hilton Hotel so we booked ourselves in for the night and ended up celebrating Steve's birthday dinner at their restaurant. [Note: we eventually got a full refund on our flight from Genoa to Munich which more than covered the added expenses.]

"Bonus" Day of Travel: We flew back across "the pond" from Munich into Chicago, breezed through immigration & customs (thanks to having Global Entry), and then caught our final and 7<sup>th</sup> flight of the overall 3-week trip to France & Italy. We were back home in Colorado in time for dinner.

Final thoughts: The basically back-to-back MT Sobek trips (Provence then Tuscany/Cinque Terre) which constituted the large part of our 3-week adventure were both rated a "3" on their level of activity scale. Thus, we knew going in that while we'd regularly be hiking, the hikes themselves would mostly be lower mileage, lower vertical than on some of the other Sobek trips as have been on ... and they were. However, we figured the cultural and culinary aspects incorporated into the trip itineraries of 2 very different but 2 areas on our "would like to visit" list would fill the gaps, so to speak, and they nicely did! Getting at least some exercise helped absolve us (at least a little) of our daily intake (ok, over indulgence) of some amazing French and Italian cuisine and beverages. We thought the experiment of doing such back-to-back MT Sobek trip successful enough that we're considering doing another such combo in the future if the opportunity presents!



*A view of Manarola from the water taxi*