



## **Cinque Terre (Sunflower Landscapes)**

Georg Henke

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The Mediterranean coast between Nizza (Nice) and La Spezia, the Riviera, was the birthplace of modern tourism in the early 1800s. The beauty of the landscape, the unspoilt and colourful old towns by the sea, the mild climate and the abundant subtropical vegetation attracted the upper classes who could afford the luxury of a leisurely stay in the warmth of the south. These wealthy people spent their days gambling in the casinos; hiking along stony mule trails or swimming in salt water was definitely not what a break in the Med was all about! But over the last 30 years the eastern part of the area, the Riviera di Levante between Genoa and La Spezia, has become a much-loved hiking: the colourful houses of the five villages, nestled against steep terraced slopes above the blue sea and still connected by old cobbled mule trails, take the visitor back to the days when the Italian coast was still unspoilt by modern civilisation. That s why this small area has been designated as an Italian national park and a UNESCO world heritage site. Further inland, the sparsely inhabited Apennines, which cross the whole Italian Peninsula from Liguria to Calabria, offer up a totally different landscape a remote area of high pastures, mixed forests and barren ridges. This area has plenty of hiking trails, but it does not satisfy the expectations of visitors seeking the charm of the Mediterranean. That s why foreign visitors tend to ignore this hinterland and why nearly all the walks in this book keep to the coast. This is a walking guide: while Landscapes guides normally feature car touring and picnicking sections, the Riviera di Levante does not lend itself to touring by car. The towns and villages are so tightly packed that parking is a major problem especially in the Cinque Terre. And since most of the trails are linear, the walks require access by public transport in any case. Visitors out for a stroll can use Sunflower's detailed maps to find the best spots for picnicking in a gorgeous setting. Area covered: The book covers the whole Riviera di Levante, from the Magra River and La Spezia in the south, via the Cinque Terre and Portofino Peninsula, to Genoa in the north. Most of the walks are by the coast, since that s where almost all visitors want to holiday, but there are a few hikes in the isolated interior. The best months for walking in this part of Italy are April to mid-June and mid-September to the end of October, but because of the mild climate, hiking can be pleasant all year round, especially if one sticks close the the coast in winter.



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