WHAT TO WEAR

The Cinque Terre isn't Saint Tropez. You won’t find residents or travelers sporting head to toe Pucci like some Riviera locations. There are no swim up bars and black tie waiters. It is pretty low-key. Because this was once a very remote part of Italy the locals tend to dress very casually. That being said, it is Italy so they are not exactly walking around in sweat pants. Italians here generally wear beautiful but understated clothes.

Daytime: You will want to bring versatile, effortless clothing. June temperatures range from lows of 61 F (16 C) to highs of 77 F (25C). Think easy breezy seaside lovin' summer dresses or pants and lights jackets or sweaters for the cooler mornings and evenings. If you want to enter churches you will need to wear sleeves. Prepare yourself for springtime showers too (now that I told you we won’t need to).

At the beach: You’ll find men in speedos and some women topless. They have a very open and casual approach to nudity/modesty and that means there are the skinniest of figures and the largest of figures happily sporting the tiniest of suits. I would pack: flip flops + a sun hat + a beach/carryall bag + beach sarong or towel + shades + cover-up for sun + sun protection + two bathing suits (best defense for tanlines).

Evenings: Locals don’t dress fancy but they might be dressier than you’re used to depending on where you come from. Italians on vacation, even from Milan, don’t head to the nearest watering hole in Gucci separates like they would in the city. This is easy breezy mediteranean seaside living so anything too formal or dressy (think taffeta little black dress) is likely not going to be worn most places here. Save that for Florence. That doesn’t mean that you have to follow the rules. Do anything.

Shoes: Bring your most precious and uncomfortable shoes with the highest heels to be a complete complaining drag. Bring wedges, flats and strappy sandals to be happy and gorgeous. We will be walking around 20 minutes to dinner every night. Remember, there are no cars here. Cobblestones and stairs made 400 years ago will chew the shit out of delicate shoes. Find a happy medium. You might pack flip flops for the beach and hotel lounging.

HIKING AND EXERCISE GEAR

If you are participating in the fitness classes then pack gym gear for outside sessions. We will also be walking off-road. You don’t need to wear outrageous Patagonia style hiking boots. But something designed to walk 1-4 hours on dirt paths is essential.
MONEY-HONEY

Cash is king in Italy. Many Italians don’t have credit cards or even bank cards. Don’t expect small shops to process credit cards. Always have enough cash for whatever you like to buy that day (or three). There is a bank machine in Riomaggiore where you will be able to take out cash and airports have ATM’s so take out Euros after you disembark your plane. Banks typically charge a flat fee for each international withdrawal. If you have a credit card you could save it for larger purchases in boutiques/shops/restaurants. Make sure to call your credit card company and tell them you will be abroad so they won’t pull a nasty trick on you and cancel your cards unexpectedly. A second bank card attached to another account is the most prudent way to travel. I really don’t want to see you washing dishes in Italy to pay for another glass of wine.

Tipping is not expected in Italy and Italians generally don’t tip much, if any. But I’m not Italian so I tend to tip. That is just a personal preference. Ten percent for dinner is nice and a couple euros on the table for lunch are reasonable. The service in Italy is not what we expect here. They don’t fall over you to please you. Sometimes they can even seem brisk. Don’t take it personally. The little old ladies seem to be the grumpiest. But my technique for taming these beasts usually starts with a smile and a “grazie”.

COMMUNAL DINING

Dining in Italy is quite different than dining in North America, especially as a group. Restaurants serve groups like families, and when we are in Italy I want to share with you this incredibly fun way of eating. It is relaxed and easy for everyone. The chef and owner (with direction from us) will serve us courses Italian style, which means large portions of the same thing. Groups, only sometimes, order individually off the menu: there could be two or three choices but it really depends on the spot. They serve us their house specialties. We can’t pronounce any of it and we sometimes have no idea what it is but it is so damn tasty we forget we care. Of course concessions for food allergies and dietary restrictions can be accommodated. That info should be noted pre-trip or the cooks will cry -- and no one wants to see a two hundred pound Italian man in tears.

Your dinners are included on this trip. Wine with dinner will also be on the table and is included with your meal. Gratuities are not included in the trip price so if you feel like tipping the wait staff -- it is completely at your discretion. As is ordering more alcohol than what is provided. Have a good time and do what you feel. You don’t have to go along with the wines provided. If you feel like splurging on special wines or cocktails, we can run you a separate tab if need be.

ITALIAN FIX TRAVEL
Breakfast is served buffet style at our hotel. If there is something particular you require for breakfast please let us know in advance and we’ll hop to it.

ELECTRONICS:

You will need a two prong continental European adaptor for all electronics you bring.

Computers: You will have access to a communal computer with internet connection in the hotel lobby which is free to use after 10am. There is WIFI in the hotel lobby but not in the rooms. Unless you need your computer for work or blogging or your internet lover than leave it at home and save the space and hassle and use the communal one for skyping your kids/dog/husband.

Phone: There is a phone for use to guests at the hotel to call long-distance. You can buy a calling card in Riomaggiore. If you wanna bring your cell phone I gotta tell you it can be an expensive decision. Call your provider BEFORE you leave to understand what kind of charges you will rack up and how to protect yourself from a $300 phone bill when you get home (which I have heard of many times because of roaming fees). You will have to sort out a SIM card that works for Italy too.

MEDICINE AND ESSENTIAL NEEDS:

If you require daily medication you should bring double what you require. Pack all your meds in the ORIGINAL bottle so customs doesn’t give you flack.

There is a pharmacy in Riomaggiore that you will be able to buy toiletries/tampons etc. It is very small so if you need something very specific bring it with you.

Services in Riomaggiore include: pharmacy, a few tiny grocery stores, one bank with ATM, internet point, pay phone, tobacco store (that sells phone cards to call home), a couple small clothing boutiques and trinket shops, cafes and restaurants. There are no large department stores or supermarkets or large chain companies in all of the Cinque Terre.

I think coming to Italy without earplugs is insane. Church bells, dogs, ambient noise – especially when you are getting over jetlag, can put the savviest of traveler in a sour mood. An eye mask to block out the light is also something I can't live without for long distance plane travel. Wearing sunglasses on your flight is my best trick for beating long-haul flight fatigue. You look like a party animal who is on their way to another Berlin warehouse party but who cares if it keeps you pretty.

PRACTICALITIES:

ITALIAN FIX TRAVEL
Make sure your passport has ATLEAST six months left till it expires from your date of departure. Technically border security could hassle you if this isn’t the case.

Photocopy your passport. Bring one copy and leave one at home with someone.

Bring a copy of your medical travel insurance. Carry the phone number for out of country calls too. Please do not be John Wayne and come without travel insurance. Trip cancelation insurance is also smart for expensive flights.

Italian immigration is pretty lax. If they ask you why you are in Italy, tell them “to be a tourist”.

TRAVEL:

The easiest airport to access the Cinque Terre is Pisa. Next is Genoa. Then Milan. Then Rome. I recommend Pisa for ease, especially if you are tight on time.

If you fly into Pisa you will want to find the train. The state railway platform is outside the airport -- which is why flying into Pisa is a dream. You can buy train tickets from a kiosk inside the airport. If you are coming immediately to Riomaggiore buy a one way ticket to Riomaggiore. Find out the binario number (platform #) and wait for your first train. It will take you to Pisa Centrale (central Pisa). Disembark. Take your next connection. Disembark in La Spezia (most times). Take your third train from La Spezia to Riomaggiore. Riomaggiore will be the first stop after La Spezia (about 8 minutes) so don’t get too comfortable. If the train stops in the tunnel and people are getting off then this is likely your stop. Ask if you are confused. The platform in Riomaggiore is half inside of a tunnel so pay attention. Total travel time between Pisa and Riomaggiore varies between 85 - 100 minutes. Price varies between 12 - 25 euro. Second class is fine for such a short trip.

You can see every possible train time and schedules on the Trenitalia website. I recommend using the website to print off train departure times for your corresponding flight arrival time. It will list train numbers and where to transfer and is very handy to have in your purse when you arrive in Italy and attempt to buy a ticket from the kiosk. If the thought of train travel and using the Trenitalia website stresses you out than don’t be shy and ask us for help. http://www.trenitalia.com/

If you are arriving early you have these options: come to Riomaggiore a day or two early or stay and visit Pisa for a night or two. I wouldn’t suggest staying in Pisa for any real length of time. My hubby calls it a “hole” but sometimes after long flights you just want to
lay your head. And then you can visit Piazza da Miracoli (where you will see the leaning tower).

You officially check into your Riomaggiore hotel on Sunday June 3. That weekend just also happens to be an Italian holiday so booking hotel rooms should happen sooner than later if you are arriving in Italy early.

Yes, we do recommend arriving at least a day early in Italy. You can book a hotel either in your flight arrival city or make the trek to Riomaggiore the same day as your plane touches down. Remember, the flight to Italy is long and jetlag will kick your ass too, especially for west coasters. Giving yourself a day or two before our event is ideal. For people strapped on time just wing it and we will be waiting for you with a cocktail. I am happy to give you individual advice if you need it.

We will pick you up at the train station. In May we will write everyone with a phone number to call when you arrive in Riomaggiore. Call from the payphone at the station when you arrive and we'll come find you. Our hotel name is Cinque Terre Residences. Anyone in the village will show you where it is.

MY THOUGHTS ON PACKING:

The most miserable people you see on the trains are the ones lugging the heaviest suitcases. Rolling suitcases don’t work outside of airports as the streets are cobblestone or other uneven affairs. Stairs are everywhere. Save yourself hassle and don’t bring more luggage than you can carry by yourself. I said carry, not roll. Backpacks or luggage with shoulder straps are your best friend. Don’t bring anything that will ruin your life if lost.

Bonus points for having room in your luggage when you arrive; you know you will want to bring stuff home with you. Or bring a spare bag for returning. I have yet to see a women leave Italy without a new pair of shoes or a purse. If you do than you have the willpower of an ox.

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Big hugs! We can’t wait to see you all in Italy. Call or write if you need anything.

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