

The Cinque Terre (literally 5 lands) is a series of 5 small coastal villages just north of where we are staying. These villages have very limited road access but are connected by rail and a stunning coastal walking track. We have a picture of one of the villages above our TV at home, so the kids were keen to go and visit the area. We had walked all 5 villages in one day on our last visit, so we knew it was quite a tough day walk.

We drove to La Spezia and caught the train to the Cinque Terre from there. There are four walking tracks between the five villages, but two of them were closed due to recent slips. That solved our dilemma of how much walking the kids would cope with. One of the open walks was a 20 minute stroll and the other was a steep two hour hike. We opted for the steep hike from Monterosso (the last village) back to Vernazza and thought we would do the short stroll later in the day.



We had read that the popularity of the Cinque Terre had skyrocketed in recent years and that was not wrong. The train was packed and we arrived in Monterosso along with a few hundred people from a cruise ship. Walking towards the start of the track was like being in a flock of sheep (actually very noisy sheep, mostly of the North American variety...), but we did some running and managed to get to the front of the flock. The track started steeply with hundreds of rocky steps up through vineyards. We soon left the flock behind and I suspect most of them didn't make it very far.



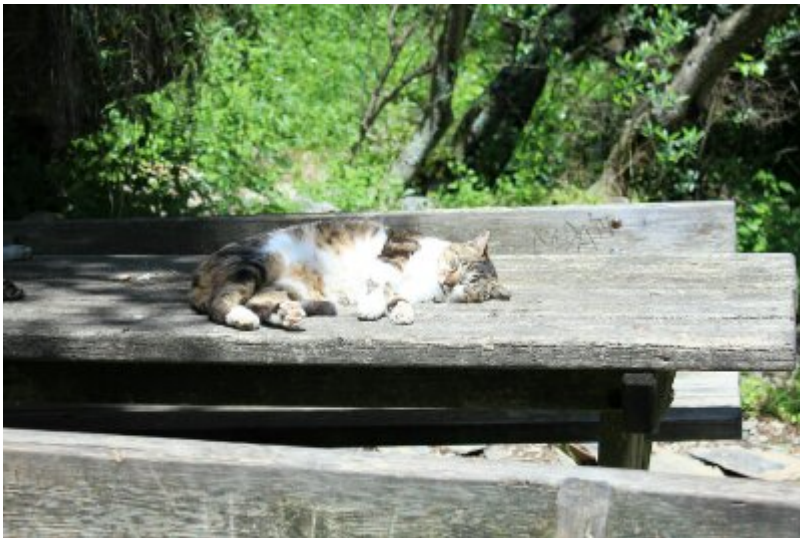


There were quite a few people on the track, but it was not unpleasantly busy. The first part was hard going as it was a steep climb in the warm weather, but the amazing views made it worthwhile. There were walkers from all over the world - the kids thought it was really funny when we bumped into a couple from Glendowie. Once we reached the highest point, the rest of the walk was pretty easy. We stopped a couple of times for picnics with million dollar views and collected our first Italian cache in a cave somewhere along the track.





Just before the cache, there were two stray cats lazing on a picnic table. Someone had left a container of food with a sign saying "Please use this food to feed these homeless and unloved cats". We had a giggle as the cats looked like two of the most contented cats we have ever seen.





We arrived in Vernazza just in time to get the train to the next village, Corniglia. The train was a bit late but the kids were kept well entertained by the helicopters delivering supplies to the vineyards just above the station. Corniglia is the only one of the five villages built away from the coast. It is reached by a flight of 365 steps from the train station, one for every day of the year. Corniglia is the smallest of the villages and was quite peaceful - wonderful for a wander through the narrow streets and a refreshing gelato.







The plan was to catch another train to the next village (Manarola) then walk to the first one (Riomaggiore). The only problem was that the trains were becoming less frequent as the day wore on. The train we were hoping to catch never arrived (we didn't notice the small print on the timetable that said it didn't run on a Tuesday), so we had to wait another 50 minutes at the station. We decided to abandon the idea of the last walk as it would mean waiting for yet another train at Riomaggiore. Instead we got the train straight back to La Spezia and drove home to Lerici.





Pierre was returned to the visitor car park and we walked the 15 minutes home from there. We were having a great debate over whether the car park was free or pay. Enrico had told Andy it was free during the week, but the signs (based on our very limited Italian) seemed to say otherwise and the fact that almost everyone else was buying tickets was a bit worrying. In the end we went with Enrico's advice and left Pierre ticketless.

After a day of walking, we realised how much fitter we have all become on this holiday. There was still enough energy left to lug our groceries up the hill and cook a feed of lasagna for dinner. We did all sleep very well that night though!