



The Ligurian Coast

Arts, history and scenery on the Riviera di Levante

3–9 May 2025 (ML 678)

7 days • £3,420

Lecturer: Dr Luca Leoncini

Spectacular scenery and amazingly picturesque towns and villages.

Art and architecture from the heyday of the Genoan Republic.

One hotel throughout.

Some journeys by boat and rail.

The rocky Ligurian coast and its immediate hinterland between Genoa and Tuscany is one of the prettiest stretches in all Italy. The backdrop of steep rugged hills, in places rising directly from the sea, has meant that until quite recent times some of the little communities which cling to the cliffs were virtually inaccessible from land. For some places that still holds true.

The culture and economy of these fishing villages and of the few towns which became established around sheltered bays were almost entirely maritime. Change was brought by the railways, clattering perilously close to the water's edge and burrowing through tunnels underneath the headlands. They brought visitors lured by the supremely picturesque junction of sea, sand, rocky foothills and the achievements of a thousand years of plucky builders to affix their dwellings, their churches and their town halls onto this rollercoaster terrain.

For most of its history it was ruled from the great city-state of Genoa, and patronage of the mercantile aristocracy from the metropolis accounts for some of the more ambitious buildings. The proportion of picturesque is probably as high as on any of our tours to Italy, and for charm of ambience and delightfulness of vista few other Italian journeys exceed it. There is also a sense of discovery: few languages other than Italian are heard, and few of the visitors make their way away from the beaches to the castles, the towns' upper regions and the museums and galleries.

Roads are narrow, precipitous and unsuitable for large coaches (some would say for sane drivers of vehicles of any stripe). Some of the journeys on this tour are by rail – there is a station just a few minutes from the hotel – and on a couple of occasions by boat.



Genoa, port, wood engraving c. 1880.

Itinerary

Day 1. Santa Margherita Ligure. Fly at c.10.00 (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Milan Linate. Continue to the charming little harbour town of Santa Margherita Ligure where all six nights are spent.

Day 2. San Fruttuoso, Portofino, Cervara. By boat to the enchanting Abbazia San Fruttuoso on the Portofino Promontory, parts of which date to the tenth century. By sea back to the exceedingly attractive former fishing village of Portofino, now a fashionable high-end resort, for lunch and free time. Then by minibus to the Abbazia della Cervara, a privately owned 14th-century monastery famous for its garden with a superb view over the Gulf of Tigullio.

Day 3. Chiavari, Cogorno. 15 minutes by train to Chiavari, a seaside town with a lovely historic centre, typical narrow streets, medieval porticos, old-fashioned shops and cafés. The Palazzo Rocca is an archaeological museum with a collection of Genoese paintings. By small coach into the hills to visit the Abbazia dei Fieschi which has a Romanesque church built by a Genoese family, an elegant example of local medieval architecture.

Day 4. Santa Margherita Ligure, Genoa. The morning is spent in the delightful resort where

the hotel is located. Walk through the town along the Passeggiata Lungomare and up a hill on the other side of the bay to the 17th-century Villa Durazzo. This is a typical suburban residence for the Genoese nobility, has well preserved interiors, a lovely small *giardino all'italiana* and fine views. Just outside the town is the Abbazia di Valle Christi, a ruined 13th-century gothic abbey with an almost intact bell tower, apse and transept.

Day 5. Genoa. Visit the capital of Liguria and once one of the great maritime republics of the Mediterranean. Lined with 16th- and 17th-century palaces, the Strada Nuova is one of the great streets of Europe. See the Palazzo Reale – magnificent stairway, splendidly furnished rooms, important paintings; and Dr. Luca Leoncini is its director.

Day 6. Portovenere, La Spezia. Drive to Portovenere, another gem of the Ligurian coast, with two beautiful Romanesque churches, 16th-century fortress and lovely views towards Lerici over the Gulf of La Spezia (or 'Bay of Poets') and the Isles of Palmaria. Byron used to stay in Portovenere and swim across the gulf. Then by boat to La Spezia to visit the Museo Amedeo Lia, a private collection which includes a Pontormo self-portrait, illuminated manuscripts and medieval panels.

The Ligurian Coast continued

Day 7. Midday flight from Milan Linate, arriving London Heathrow at c. 3.00pm.

Lecturer

Dr Luca Leoncini. Art historian specialising in 15th-century Italian painting. His first degree and PhD were from Rome University followed by research at the Warburg Institute in London. He has published articles on the classical tradition in Italian art of the 15th century and contributed to the *Macmillan Dictionary of Art*. He has also written on Mantegna and Renaissance drawings.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,420 or £3,220 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,950 or £3,750 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 319); travel by private coach, by rail and boat; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 1 lunch and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Continental, Santa Margherita Ligure (hotel-continental.it/en): an excellently situated 4-star overlooking the sea, the picturesque harbour, and the old town. All rooms are with sea-view. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is inevitably quite a lot of walking and standing in museums and churches on this tour. The coach cannot be used within the town centres, therefore some travel is by rail and ferry. Average distance by coach per day including the long journeys to and from airports: 57 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.