



HEAD FOR HEIGHTS
Hiking south from Monterosso al Mare, left, one of the Cinque Terre villages; the train at Vernazza, below

It was just us, the mountain goats and the sea below'

CROWD-FREE LIGURIA
Just a few miles from the famous Cinque Terre, Sarah Baxter discovers the photogenic – but tranquil – villages of Framurra

WELCOME to the real Liguria," guide Enrico declared as he insisted on having the fresh, handmade version from Genoa'

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Challenge accepted, Sesta Terra opened in July 2016. "We call it a 'natural resort' rather than glamping," Nicola explained, over a plate of trofie pasta and pesto – a Ligurian speciality. "We're striving to be elegant and respectful – to nature and to the community." Around 90 per cent of staff are local, and Nicola encourages guests to explore beyond Sesta Terra's infinity pool, small spa, bar and dreamy terraces. I was glad on his recommendation I ate at La Gave, a restaurant squashed into the cliffs overlooking Framurra's small harbour. From my table, I gazed across the bay to watch the sun sinking behind Monte Serru while owner Marco delivered dish after dish and glass after glass of deliciousness. Butter-soft prawns, cuttlefish ragù and perfectly charred octopus came with local wines – Marco is president of the Entoteca Regionale della Liguria so knows, well, everything about the region's viticulture. The best, a simple bianchetta, was "the expression of the sea"; this is the stuff, he said, that fuelled the hardworking dockers of Genoa, who'd start each day with a litre of bianchetta and a kilo of fecceca.

The next morning – and deciding against wine for breakfast – I met guide Britta and hopped on the train. The game-changing Genoa-Pisa railway opened in 1874 and kept Liguria alive, linking the isolated coastal villages with the outside world; roads only arrived in the Sixties. We travelled south from Framurra to Vernazza; population 850, but visited by around 2.5 million tourists per year. Catastrophic floods devastated Vernazza in 2011 but, miraculously, its squeeze of pastel houses, medieval castle and tiny harbour are pretty as a picture again now.

It was still early when we arrived; old Italian gents gesticulated over the day's first espresso in the main square while trolleys wheeled newspapers and crates of tomatoes into opening shops. Britta's favourite café was still closed, though we managed to chat to its owner, Massimo. During the flood, Britta later told me, Massimo had an alyshah, all have killer sea views. It's the vision of Nicola Cosciani Canico and his wife, Anna. Originally from Padua, they holidayed often in Framurra and dreamed of making a permanent move. After happening upon a glamping site overseas – the concept is yet to take off in Italy – a seed was planted. Nicola asked Framurra's mayor if he could build something similar here, and the mayor said so – unless he bought and transformed the rundown campsite.



ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE
Genoa and Pisa airports are both around 90 minutes' drive from Framurra.

WHERE TO STAY
Sesta Terra has lodges and wooden cottages; rates from €225 (€204) per night (sestatera.com).

WHAT TO DO
Pesto-making classes in Levanto cost €10pp (foodofleap/pesto-cooking-classes). The menu degustation at La Gave costs €60 (lagaveframurra.it).

SIGHT INFORMATION
framurra.it; framaraturismo.it; visitilevanto.it/en

walks, skittering lizards and vineyards so steep and awkward it's amazing that anyone would bother – indeed, many of the old terraces have been abandoned to rampant Mediterranean maquis plants. Climbing higher, Vernazza became more and more like a toy town; on one side, the sea sparkled, the other was an explosion of green. It was hot walking, and we were glad of patches of fragrant pine andholm oaks, and of the hilltop sanctuaries that provided water, shade and stories. At the Sanctuary of the Madonna di Soviore, a painting relaid the legend of how the church's Madonna statue, long barbed and lost, was rediscovered by a pigeon shooting a rainbow out of its bottom. We saw barely a soul on our hike, perhaps due to the mud-dogs-and-Englishwoman insanity of hiking in July, but also because the majority of

5 WAYS TO EXPLORE THE CINQUE TERRE

BY CAR
The Genoa-Livorno highway is the main artery; off this, roads to Framurra and surrounds are narrow, steep and hair-pinned. Cars are largely prohibited in Cinque Terre villages.

BY BIKE
Parts of the original 19th-century railway tunnels, abandoned in the Thirties, reopened in 2011 as the MareMonte cycle path, providing a cool, flat, fast link between Levanto, Bonassola and Framurra.

BY TRAIN
Trains run all along Italy's west coast. Genoa-Framurra by train takes around 90 minutes. From Framurra, it's just seven minutes to Levanto, and around 16 minutes to Vernazza.

BY BOAT
From April to October, ferries connect the Cinque Terre villages (excluding Corniglia). A one-day ticket costs from €27 (€24). There are also connections to Levanto and La Spezia.

ON FOOT
More than 100 hiking trails lace Cinque Terre National Park, with many more in the surrounding area (see framuraturismo.it). Most popular by far is the seven-and-a-half-mile (12km) Blue Path between the five villages, currently open only between Monterosso, Vernazza and Corniglia. It costs €7.50; a Cinque Terre card, covering the hike and one day's train travel, costs €16. All other hikes are free.



ITALY
FRAMURRA
LIGURIA
CINQUE TERRE
Ligurian Sea

LA DOLE VITA
Castagnola, main one of the five villages of Framurra, pesto, bottom right. In panel, below Vernazza, left, and Levanto



GOOD TASTE
Fine dining at La Gave, and glamping at Sesta Terra

Terre the hills diving toward the villages clinging on for dear life. We finished in Levanto, just outside the national park, settled in Roman times, part of the Republic of Genoa from the 13th century. It was a wealthy trading town and stop-off on the Via Francigena pilgrimage from Canterbury to Rome. I was happy to noodle along its medieval alleys and fragments of old walls but, sweaty and hungry, I was glad not to be pilgrimising further. Luckily, hotelier Silvia Moggi was waiting with sustenance – she was going to teach me to make the most Ligurian dish of all, pesto. "Frank Sinatra made it famous," she explained, as I tied my apron. "He insisted on having fresh handmade pesto from Genoa." Officially it should be made with local ingredients such as Genovese basil, Ligurian extra virgin olive oil and Vessalico garlic, and pounded in a white Carrara marble mortar. "You can tailor it to your tastes, though," Silvia assured me, as I pounded the mix, sending pine nuts flying. "I started making it on my grandpa's balcony when I was five years old and have my way. But everyone's pesto is different." Mine was pretty good, though given these quality ingredients, I'm not sure you can go too wrong. Another scorching day followed, and another scorching hike. Britta and I walked down from Sesta Terra into the lower hamlets of Framurra. In the first, Seta, we stopped for cappuccino and focaccia – a proper Genoese breakfast. And when the café owner realised we'd inadvertently eaten yesterday's stale bread, he refused to let us go. We continued between the archways and narrow alleys to Anzo, where fine silk and linen were woven. The boundlessly enthusiastic owner of nearby C.A. du Ferris. The winery was founded 20 years ago by his parents, who painstakingly hand-chose four hectares of overgrown vineyards along the coast. After studying to be a magistrate, David decided to return home instead, making it his civic duty to revive the landscape. He makes wines – the sea-salty Bonazole ("It tastes like an infinity shore"), and the smoky-sweet L'antapprendite. But he also wants to make a difference, from increasing the vineyard's biodiversity to forming creative partnerships. I tried the delicious heather honey he produces in collaboration with a local beekeeper, sadly not the wine sort invented by a platerista in Bonassola. He is also working with geneticists to resurrect ruzzone, an old Ligurian grape thought extinct since phylloxera decimated the Cinque Terre vineyards in the 1920s. Showing me around his vines, he pointed proudly at the rows of robust ruzzone "My babies!" All being well, they will be ready to drink in 2022, for the first time in a century. Sitting under a parasol, tasting David's wines with a plate of organic cheese and a view out to sea, I raised a glass to his project, his passion, and to discovering that the pleasures of the Ligurian coast extend far beyond its famous five.