

Exploring Tuscany and the Ligurian Coast

The Italian Riviera and Tuscany
September 21 - 29, 2025



Features

- Nine nights in the “field” at small hotels
- Sleeping indoors and a luggage shuttle means you are only carrying a daypack
- Two robust hiking days, three moderate day-hiking days, four train/shuttle/sightseeing days
- Approx. 30-mile, trailed route crisscrossing the Ligurian Coast and Tuscan hills
- Lunch and wine tasting at Panzanello winery and organic olive oil site
- Stunning coastal scenery of the “Italian Riviera” and the heart of the Tuscan hill country
- Hiking at elevations of 0-1,700 feet
- Cultural interaction and exploration of ancient villages, towns, and landmarks

Cost: \$3,995 Pre- and Post trip lodging included

Max group size: 12 Participants

Minimum Age: 18

2 NOLS Instructors

Historic Age Range: 28-74

Trip Description

Join a small group of NOLS grads, friends, families, and instructors for nine days of exploration, backpacking and camaraderie along the Ligurian Coast and Tuscan countryside. We will use trains, shuttles, and foot power to connect small hotels and B&B's in Italy's early autumn. This trip mixes hikes with exploration of the region's iconic towns, villages, rural areas and ancient landmarks.

It may be helpful to think of this trip as divided into three sections. There's some urban, self-guided adventuring in Pisa, Lucca and Siena in addition to the beginning and end in Turin. There is a coastal exploration element, including most of the traditional “hiking” along the trails and fishing villages of the Portofino Peninsula and Cinque Terre National Parks. Finally, there is time for day hiking and sightseeing in the villages and vineyards of the classic Tuscan countryside of Chianti and Panzano. All of these sections are connected by foot, shuttle, or train.

The trip starts and ends in the city of Turin. This stunning city is the home to car manufacturer, Fiat, and many incredible museums. We highly recommend showing up a few days early and staying late if you are able! To encourage a bit of sightseeing we invite you to arrive early for the trip and join our instructors for an evening of wine and cheese tasting a day before the trip starts. This also allows for extra time in dealing with travel delays, jet lag or baggage snafus.

From Turin, our group will take a series of train, bus and shuttle rides to and from our “road-heads” on the coast and amongst the vineyards. After leaving Turin, the route generally travels the coast from Santa Margherita Ligure/Rapallo/Portofino southward toward the Cinque Terre area and La Spezia. The trip then heads south to Lucca/Pisa and southeast into the Tuscan hills and the rural Panzano/Chianti and Siena area.

This trip will re-acquaint you with NOLS travel techniques in a convivial, relaxing, and visually stunning location. Instruction is geared to your interests, with optional walk-up high points, Italian "word(s) of the day," time for journal writing, photography, and more.

The route offers a modest level of hiking—the average hiking day is about six miles with minor changes in elevation. For those who want more, there will be options for additional day hiking with an instructor.

During this trip you will have a few different bags to pack as we have a luggage shuttle but you will also need to move your own bags a bit. Large luggage and travel gear can be left at our origination hotel so that only a small bag and your daypack come "into the field" with us. More details on this system can be found below.

Connecting our string of hotels, inns, and B&B's gives us the chance to savor Italian cuisine and culture while mixing with other travelers. Sleeping and group dining (dinner and breakfasts) in villages and small towns allows us to considerably lighten our packs for daily exploration along the area's coast and vineyards.

The trip spends nine nights in the "field" at guesthouses or hotels and nine varied hiking/traveling days. Unlike standard NOLS expeditions, we won't carry cook gear or heavy rations—even pads and sleeping bags are not needed at our small hotels—but we'll do some "real" trail hiking over varied terrain.

Environment

Italy's Ligurian coast offers a variety of mountain terrain: grassy meadows, stands of conifers, cactus, vineyards, citrus, well-developed trails and thick, coastal vegetation. The hiking portions of our trek follow established trails with limited signage and some steep sections. In addition, the weather at this time of year can vary to include hot, sunny days, humidity, and rain. Temps are likely to be 75° F. during the day and near 60° F. at night.

Cinque Terre trails can include significant elevation gain and loss, perhaps up to 2,400' in a day. The traditional hiking portions of our trek follow established trails with limited signage and some steep, exposed sections through Cinque Terre ("The Five Lands") and the Portofino Peninsula. The Cinque Terre National Park is a protected area inducted as Italy's first national park in 1999. Located in the province of La Spezia, Liguria, northern Italy, it is the smallest national park in Italy at 4,300 acres, but also the most densely populated with 5,000 permanent inhabitants among the five towns. Cinque Terre became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997.

The Portofino Peninsula has 80 km of trails in the protected Portofino Park. The village of Portofino was founded by the Romans and named *Portus Delphini*, or Port of the Dolphin, because of the large number of dolphins inhabiting the gulf. The peninsula is famous for the seaside San Fruttuoso, a Benedictine Abbey, which dates back to the 10th century. Over the years, the abbey housed monks, fisherman, pirates and princes, and today is only accessible by foot or boat. The terraced Nozarego olive groves stretch along the eastern side of the Park. The monks of San Fruttuoso's agricultural system centered around olive, chestnut, fig, and cereal grain production. As such, the *Vallone*

dell'Acqua Viva ("Valley of Living Water") has abundant olive and chestnut trees and has an extraordinary concentration of mills and presses; there were 35 working factories in the middle of the 18th century. Their remnants represent an important archaeological, agricultural, and industrial heritage. The area has many species of animals, including gulls, peregrine falcons, ravens, badgers, martens, foxes and even wild boar. Reptiles include wall lizards and various snakes. Frogs and salamanders abound.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are employees of NOLS, trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers to build the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

A Day in the Life

Mornings start with breakfast at our hotel followed by check-out and departure for our day's activities. Typically, we will depart for our hike or to catch our train between 8-9:30 a.m.

The balance of the day includes hiking as a group or exploring a new city in a self-guided tour. When hiking, we will stop for picnic lunches of local cheeses, cured meats, local breads, fruits and other delectable viands. When exploring a city, lunch will be on your own, but we will provide recommendations.

Our moving days end with hotel arrival and checking into our rooms. There will be some amount of unstructured time to relax, swim in the Mediterranean or the hotel pool. The team will set a time to meet for an aperitivo before dinner (this is a great Italian tradition). Dinners are at a local restaurant or at the hotel and include some pre-planning for the following day.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 3 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we

enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group’s schedule for your munchies.

Curriculum

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts, including map reading, hiking, and group travel. The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to comfortably travel, as well as optional topics as desired by participants. These could include natural history, local history, leadership, decision making, and team function, among other things. Formal “classes” are few and mostly optional but informal discussions are plentiful. Anticipate a required base level of group management and cohesion—this is an expedition.

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it’s not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You’ll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip’s anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the Trip experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

Sept 19	Depending on connections and possible pre- trip plans, many participants depart the US on this day.	
Sept 20	We urge you to arrive in Turin on this day, allowing for jet lag recovery, baggage snafus and some optional activities on the next day. For those in town, we’ll host an optional “wine rally.” Meet in the lobby of the Star Hotel Majestic at 6 p.m. where we’ll introduce local wines and cheeses. It’s a chance to meet the group and get a taste of the region’s fantastic foods. Please RSVP.	Lodging: on your own, but we suggest the Star Hotel Majestic .
Sept 21	For those in Turin, we’ll loosely organize some optional sightseeing activities from our hotel. Our pre-trip group orientation occurs at 6 p.m. in Star Hotel Majestic lobby or nearby.	Lodging provided by NOLS: Star Hotel Majestic

Sept 22	Pack and leave the hotel early to catch the train to Santa Margherita Ligure. Check into hotel and day hike ~4 miles onto the Portofino Peninsula high points.	Lodging: Hotel Laurin, Santa Margherita Ligure
Sept 23	Hiking traverse of the Portofino Peninsula. ~9 miles of trail hiking.	Lodging: Hotel Cenobio dei Dogi, Camogli.
Sept 24	Train from Camogli to Levanto; this is the beginning of the Cinque Terre National Park coastal hike from Levanto to Monterosso, ~6 miles of hiking. Catch an afternoon train to Viareggio.	Lodging: Palace Hotel
Sept 25	Train to Pisa for exploration with ~3 miles of hiking around the sights.	Lodging: Palace Hotel Lunch on your own in Pisa
Sept 26	Late morning train to Lucca. ~3 miles of hiking around the sights.	Lodging: Hotel Ilario, Lucca. Lunch on your own in Lucca.
Sept 27	Train to Florence and then shuttle to Chianti. Spend the day in the city and possibly exploring a local vineyard.	Lodging: Hotel Palazza Squarcialupi.
Sept 28	Shuttle to the villages of Monteriggioni and Siena. Exploration. Transfer to Livorno ~4 miles of hiking.	Lodging in Livorno. Lunch on your own in Siena.
Sept 29	Shuttle to Florence. Train to Turin. Final night of the trip. Group dinner.	Lodging: Star Hotel Majestic
Sept 30	Depart for home or other travels.	

Trip Logistics

The trip starts and ends in the ancient city of Turin. Please plan on arriving in Turin a night early to allow for jet lag recovery, possible airline delays, optional wine tasting, and for optional group day-touring before our official trip orientation meeting.

Travel

Recommended Option

Turin (code: TRN) is served by Lufthansa regional flights out of Munich and Frankfurt. Depending on where you first touchdown in Europe, you may either clear customs in that city or in Turin. You don't need a visa, but customs will stamp your passport.

In Italian, Turin is “Torino;” two different words for the same city.

There is bus service ([ARRIVA SADEM](#)) from the Turin airport into downtown and the Porta Nuova station. Our group hotel is one block from this stop. Cost is € 6.00 for the local service (45 minute ride) or € 7.00 for the express service (30 minute ride).

Alternate Options

Milan is a workable alternative via Malpensa (MXP) or Linate (LIN) Airports. It's an easy train to Milan's Central Station to pick up a high speed train to Turin (~1-hour).

When you arrive at Milan Malpensa Airport (MXP) you'll likely retrieve your luggage in Terminal #1. Follow the sign to the trains via a pedestrian tunnel. Purchase a ticket at the counter for a ride from Malpensa to Milano Centrale (~13.00 euros, one way). Trains leave hourly at 22 and 43 minutes after the hour. After your trip, it's easy to purchase a return train ticket in Turin directly to Malpensa Airport.

Please note that Milan's Stazione Centrale has some very good and inexpensive sandwich shops outside the secured train platform area. Consider picking up a bottle of water and a sandwich for the train ride if you're purchasing tickets in the main station.

At Milan Central Station, tickets are available from machines in the secured platform area to Turin Central Station. To use the ticket machines, select your language and use a credit card with chip technology. Alternatively, you can exit security and proceed into the Station Head House and go to the ticket windows for intercity trains. Purchase a ticket to Torino (station Porta Nuova—"per favore un biglietto per Torino andata solamente." Cost is about €38). Validate your ticket using the yellow trackside punch machine before boarding your train.

The train tickets are printed with important information. Typical wording might say "Carrozza 005, posti 31 finestrino." This means that you are on car 005, your reserved window seat is number 31. The trains are smoke-free and luggage is stored in the compartment or at either end of the carriage.

Depending on the train, the trip from Milan to Turin takes about 60 minutes. Turin has several train stations: the one you want is Torino Porta Nuova. Pre-booking and purchasing a ticket online is less expensive, especially for the high speed ("freccie") trains. Web site: www.trenitalia.com/tcom-en

Lodging

NOLS has secured lodging for our group (we'll pair couples and single-gender rooms) at Turin's Starhotels Majestic on the and last nights, breakfast is included. We'll pair you in single gender hotel rooms—if you're traveling with a partner, please let us know. The hotel is a five-minute walk from the train station. If you want extra lodging in Turin before or after the trip, we suggest you try www.booking.com.

Address: Starhotels Majestic, Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, 54, Turin, Italy.

Storage of Personal Belongings

You can leave valuables and luggage in a secure area at our first hotel for the duration of the backcountry trip. While the storage is secure, NOLS assumes no responsibility for the stored items. Although our partners have never had a problem, think twice before storing electronics or other expensive items in your in-town luggage.

Currency

You'll need cash in the form of Euros for miscellaneous purchases and transportation throughout the trip. You'll receive the best exchange at your local bank, but money change kiosks are handy in most airports. US credit cards will work in most locations, including train stations, but it's often a good idea to give your credit card company a heads up that you're traveling internationally. About 100 Euros will be plenty of cash for the field portion of the trip for incidental purchases.

Tipping

Tipping in the service industry in Italy is common but not as high as it is in the US. 5-10% is standard in restaurants that do not charge a *servizio*. A *servizio* is a service charge and takes the place of a tip. Tipping other service workers is common as well but small amounts of 1-2 Euros is standard.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Travel Insurance

We recommend making travel plans as soon as possible to avoid complications. It may also be beneficial to purchase tickets that are refundable or changeable. Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier to discuss options, or see travelguard.com.

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Visa / Passport - Attention International European travelers - **Must read... Action Required**

If your travels have you **entering or transiting (passing through or laying over in) the UK**, you will need to apply for and have an approved Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) to continue to your destination.

This [article](#) explains that starting Jan 8, 2025, US and Canadian citizens will need to apply for the ETA to enter the UK.

Here's [the link](#) for how to apply.

As well, for NOLS International Alumni trips, your **passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months post trip**. For example, if your trip in Europe concludes on July 30, 2025, your passport must be valid through January 30, 2026.

At some point in the future (July 2025?) Europe (EU) will be requiring a travel authorization for most countries that are visa-exempt. This includes USA citizens. Once this system goes into effect, you will need to apply using this new system before traveling and pay a small fee for the authorization.

[You can read about this new program, check your requirements, and view the most up to date expected implementation date here.](#)

Electricity stuff

You will have regular access to power plugs on this trip and be able to plug in and charge your devices. To do this, you will need a Type C adapter. Each rifugio will have at least some available charging capability and Wifi.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Suggested Readings

- *Italianissimo: The Quintessential Guide to What Italians Do Best*. Apatoff, L. & Fili L.
- *Sprezzatura: 50 Ways Italian Genius Shaped the World*, D'Epiro, P. & Pinkowish, M.D.
- *The Pursuit of Italy: A History of a Land, Its Regions, and Their Peoples*, Gilmour, D
- *A Soldier of the Great War*, Helprin, Mark

Local Recommendations

- Museo Egizio- top Egyptian museum outside of Egypt.
- Royal Palace of Turin and Piazza Castello and the Shroud of Turin.

Fun facts about Turin

- Italy's capital of chocolate-gianduiotti and pasta gianduja, the precursor to Nutella

- Birthplace of the Aperitif
- The Turin area is the birthplace of the Slow Food Movement
- The birthplace of Eataly- two locations, one near our hotel
- Headquarters for Fiat Chrysler Automotive
- Home of the 2006 Winter Olympics
- Turin's historic cafes birthed the unique coffee drink- Bicerin (espresso, chocolate and whole milk served layered in a small rounded glass).

Packing System

This trip has a 3 bag system that you will utilize.

1. Travel bag - This might be a larger suitcase of some variety that you traveled to Italy with. This bag will be left at the first hotel along with anything you don't need for the trip. You will not have access to this bag throughout the trip.
2. Trip Luggage - This bag will be transported for you between lodgings during the trip, but you will also have to carry it on a few short walks (10-15 minutes). Please keep this bag size to an airline carry-on or something equivalent to [a 40 Liter duffel](#). A rolling bag could be nice for this but make sure the wheels are robust for rough roads, cobblestones, and some stairs.
3. Day Pack - Something small that can carry your water, sunscreen, a few snacks, and layers.

Equipment List

Upper Body Clothing	
Equipment	Notes
Base layer (light or midweight)	Wool or synthetic
Long sleeve shirt	Important for sun protection, synthetic or wool
Wind shirt (optional)	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style
Rain jacket	A sturdy, waterproof jacket with a hood. Both coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable
T-shirt (1-2)	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool t-shirt
Sports Bra or Tank (2-3)	Synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank are recommended
Sun hat	Baseball cap or full brim
Lower Body Clothing	
Equipment	Notes
Hiking shorts	Nylon, quick dry shorts
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	Wear what's comfortable; cotton, silk, or synthetics are fine
Footwear	

Equipment	Notes
Approach or Hiking Shoes	You will need a sturdy pair of shoes to hike in. Consider trail hiking shoes or approach shoes for something lighter than traditional boots
Gaiters (optional)	Short gaiters to keep rocks and debris out of their shoes
Sneakers or non-hiking shoe	Something to wear around the hotels and city walking
Socks (2-3 pairs)	½ crew to crew length wool socks. Cotton socks are not advised
Miscellaneous Personal Gear	
Equipment	Notes
Small backpack	Must be big enough to carry personal items (e.g., water, food, clothing layers) and lunch—15-25L
Small duffel	~ 40 Liters in size, this is your Trip Luggage bag.
Plastic Trash Bags (1-2)	One to two heavy-duty trash compactor bags (33 gallon) to help waterproof items in your pack
Water Bottles	Bottles with at total capacity of at least 2 Liters
Lip Balm (1-2)	SPF 15 or greater
Sunscreen	SPF 30 or greater
Sunglasses	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc. Ear plugs and eye covers can be nice
Beach wear	Swim suit, goggles, beach sandals
Optional Items	
Trekking Poles	Most participants enjoy hiking with 2 poles
Hydration System	Very handy and popular
Book or e-reader	Bring something fun to read
Camera	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Casual Clothes	Shirt/pants/skirt for dinner or hanging out around the hotels
Pack Cover	Heavy weight and attachable to your pack