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PORT EXPLORER



PORTOVENERE

ITALY

The ancient town of Portovenere looks as if a brilliant impressionist painting has come to life. This romantic sentiment may not have been shared by those defending or assaulting the town over the past 1,000 years. However, today it can be said with relative certainty that there is little chance of an attack by the Republic of Pisa, Saracen pirates, barbaric hordes or French Emperors. In other words, relax, have fun and enjoy your day in lovely, peaceful Portovenere.

With a population a little over 4,000, Portovenere is a small, medieval town. It was built and defended by the Republic of Genoa for nearly 800 years. This hilly point of land stretches north along the coast of the famous “Cinque Terre”. The town’s nearest neighbor is the city of La Spezia, just east, around the corner of the “Gulf of Poets”. So named for the great writers who praised, loved, lived and died in this beautiful region of Liguria, if they are somehow lost in time, Petrarch and Dante, Percy Shelley and Lord Byron will forever be remembered here.

The historic center of Portovenere is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The narrow streets and alleys are closed to traffic and perfect for exploring on foot. As visitors come ashore they will see the tall, colorful houses which line the waterfront. The pedestrian promenade is relatively new because in centuries past the homes along the harbor were built to the water’s edge and formed the town’s first line of defense against attack from the sea. Today the expanded waterfront has many shops and cafés which cater to visitors from around the world.

Before you step through the ancient gate of the city and begin your exploration of Portovenere ... look up, just above the keystone of the arch. Nearly one thousand years ago, on the orders of the great Maritime Republic’s magistrate, a humble, Italian mason picked up his hammer and sharpened his chisel. He carved Latin script in stone; “Colonia Januensis 1113”. You will see the words when you reach the city gate of beautiful Portovenere, “Colony of Genoa since 1113”.



HISTORY

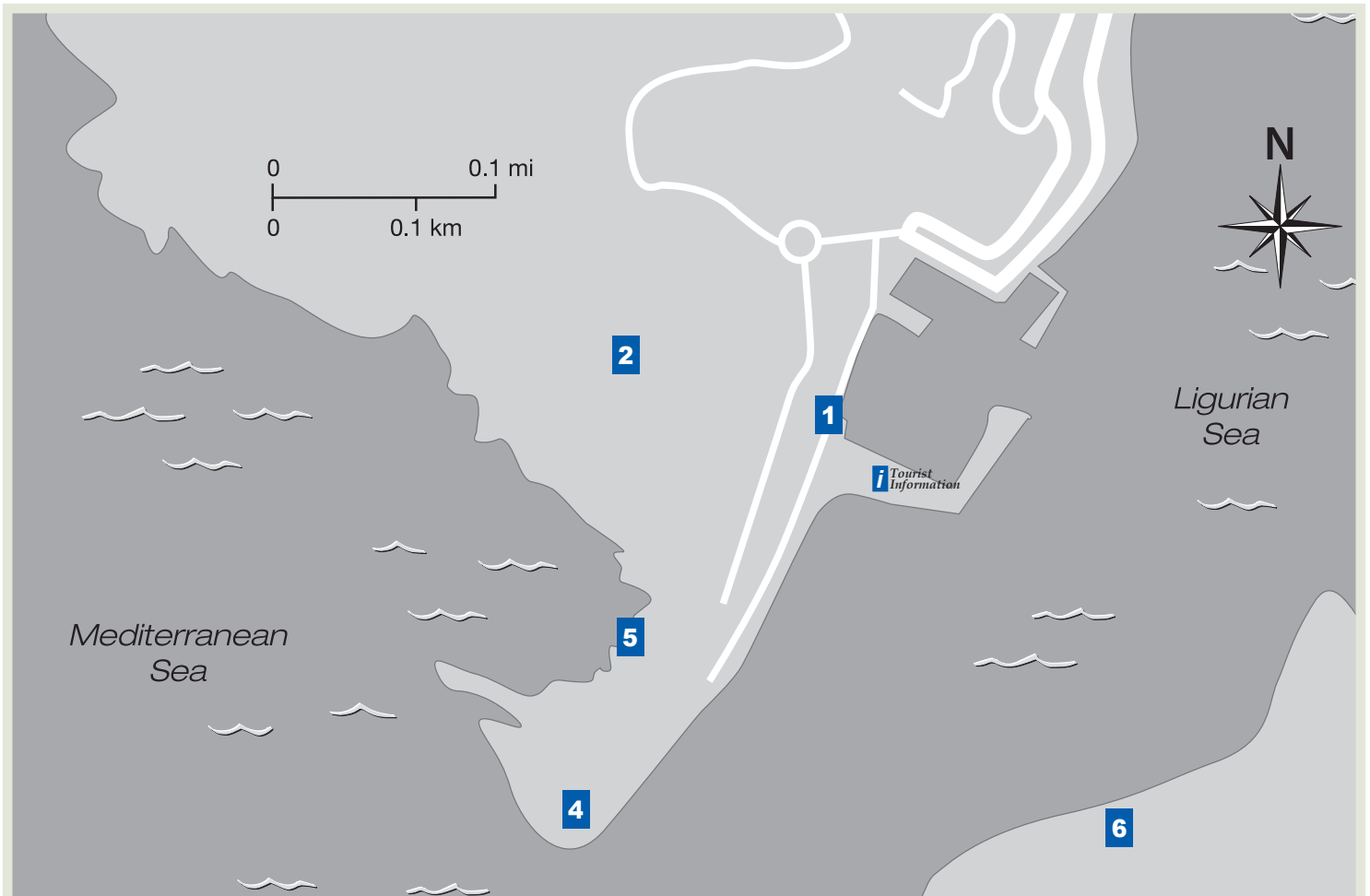
Portovenere was founded by the Romans in the 1st century BC. Known as Portus Veneris, it was built upon a promontory which juts out into the sea. As the empire slowly disintegrated, Portovenere came under the eventual control of the Byzantines. King Rothari of the Germanic Lombards took the town, along with much of rest of Italy, in the mid-600s.

The struggle between the great Maritime Republics of Genoa and Pisa often caught little Portovenere in the middle. From the mid-1100s through the late-1200s Genoa expanded the town’s fortifications and defenses while Pisa continued to attack them. Saracen pirates were also a constant threat.

A short distance across the water from Portovenere are the three small islands of Palmaria, Tino and Tinetto. During the Middle Ages a number of monasteries were built on the islands. During times of peace the Catholic cloisters helped to attract pilgrims to Portovenere.

Over the centuries the Italian Republics, France, Spain and the Catholic Popes were continually at odds with each other. Portovenere came under heavy bombardment from a mighty Aragonese fleet in 1494. Though the town did not fall, Portovenere suffered heavy damage. Warfare had changed and what the town now lacked in terms of military value it began to make up for in commercial shipping.

With the coming of Napoleon, in the early 1800s the nearby port of La Spezia began to overshadow little Portovenere. Perhaps that was a good thing because the town retained much of its medieval charm and flavor. The barbarians, Byz-



antines, Saracen pirates, Pisans and Genoese of yesteryear would easily recognize, be warmly welcomed and feel right at home in today's beautiful Portovenere ... as long as they behave themselves.

PLACES OF INTEREST

1 Calata Doria is the town's waterfront. With a perfect view of nearby Palmaria Island and all the boats bobbing in the harbor, this is a wonderful promenade lined with tall, colorful houses, restaurants, shops and cafés. It is a great place to take a stroll, browse for souvenirs, enjoy a meal or relax with a cappuccino.

2 Doria Castle looms over Portovenere like a dark and dangerous storm cloud. That was exactly what the Genoese had in mind when they began construction in 1161. From high upon the hill, the walls of the castle form the town's defense. The view of the town and surrounding sea are fantastic and have changed little from when soldiers and local people sought the protection of its mighty bastions. The castle and small museum are open to the public.

3 St. Lawrence is a Romanesque style church built by the Genoese beginning in 1098. The church is believed to rest upon the foundation of a Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter. Damaged by fire and cannon balls, the church has been repaired and restored numerous times over the centuries.

4 The Church of St Peter was dedicated in 1198. Another church had been there for the previous 500 years. This is the site from whence Portovenere gets its name. Located at the end of a short, rocky peninsula, the church is believed to stand on the foundation of an ancient Roman temple dedicated to the Venus. The church was a gift from the Republic of Genoa to the citizens of Portovenere for their vigorous defense of the town. The view from the church is spectacular.

5 Lord Byron's Grotto (Grotta dell'Arpaia) is near the Church of St Peter, at the end of the peninsula which leads out from Portovenere. Though most of the ancient grotto is now in ruins, with jagged cliffs and the turquoise Ligurian Sea, it remains a beautiful site. The grotto took on the name of the famed English poet who loved to swim and relax here in the 1820s.

6 Palmaria Island is just across the water from Portovenere. It is easily accessible by small boats which take visitors back and forth from the waterfront. A number of hiking trails and narrow roads make their way around the island. There are wonderful views of Portovenere, the Gulf of Poets and the surrounding sea. There are a few little restaurants and some nice, small beaches on the island.

Beyond Portovenere

Lerici is a beautiful town, about an hour's drive around the coast, on the far side of the Gulf of Poets. The town is a beach-lover's playground and has one of the most interesting castles in the region. Lerici became the village of choice for many 19th century English writers.

Cinque Terre, the "Five Lands", is justifiably famous as one of the most stunningly beautiful coastal regions in all of Italy. The "Five Lands" actually refer to the five little villages which are sprinkled like jewels along the steep, rugged coast from Portovenere to Monterosso al Mare. Hiking trails stretch the length of the coast and the views are unsurpassed. Ferries depart from Portovenere and make round trips to the towns of Cinque Terre.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Portovenere and the surrounding area we suggest you take one of our organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult your Shore Excursion Brochure or contact the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, be advised to take only necessary items and secure any valuables onboard.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Attire: Shorts and tank-tops are not recommended, especially when visiting local churches.

Bargaining: Most items have fixed prices, but it may be possible to get a discount on a large purchase. Some vendors may bargain, except for food items.

Tipping: Generally a 10% service charge is added to restaurant bills, however, as this amount does not all go to the waiter, it is normal to offer them a 5% tip in addition to any service charge. For taxi drivers, a 5-10% tip is acceptable.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

The key ingredient to Liguria's regional cuisine is the famous olive oil. While some olive oils can be rather overpowering in taste and smell, the oil in Liguria is light, slightly sweet and aromatic. It goes especially well with many of the local pasta and seafood dishes. Cuttlefish ("seppie"), octopus ("pulpo"), langustino and marinated anchovies are abundant and fresh. Mussels have been farmed and harvested in the waters around Portovenere for well over a century.

The region's famous pesto combines olive oil, parmesan cheese, basil, pine nuts, fresh garlic, salt and pepper. Trofie al Pesto is the popular dish which adds fresh pesto to the curly little pasta.

Farinata is Liguria's unleavened flatbread. Made from chick pea flour and baked in a fire oven, it is often spread with fresh pesto and eaten while still hot.

The coastal vineyards throughout Cinque Terre produce some very good red and white wines. Growing conditions are extremely challenging due to the steep terrain. It has taken

a great deal of hard work over the centuries to terrace the hillsides. Gathering the harvest has always been labor intensive and challenging. One of the region's most popular wines is Sclacchetrà. It is a sweet, golden-colored, desert wine, pressed from sun dried grapes. This particular wine has been a favorite since the days of the Roman Empire.

SHOPPING FACILITIES

There are nice little shops and street vendors along the harbor front and scattered throughout Portovenere. The town is safe, compact and it's virtually impossible to get lost. Explore the narrow streets which date to the Middle Ages. You will discover hidden gems around every corner. Hand-painted glass and ceramics are among the beautiful, locally produced products. Well-made Italian clothes and the region's famous olive oil are also popular.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Italy is the euro (€). Most stores accept major credit cards.

TOURIST INFORMATION

A Tourist Information Office is located in the Piazza Bastreri. A Post Office is located at #133 Via Capellini.

TRANSPORTATION

It is easy to walk around in Portovenere. Cars and taxis are restricted from much of the historic town. Taxis and busses are available if you wish to travel to La Spezia. The ferries are very popular and the ride provides a wonderful view of the coast. The ferries connect Portovenere with La Spezia, Lerici, the Gulf Islands and the villages of Cinque Terre.

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

English - Italian

Yes - Sì

No - No

Good day - Buon Giorno

Good bye - Arrivederci

Thank-you - Grazie

You're welcome - Prego

