Enchanting Cinque Terre. Picture perfect.

A three week ultimate sister getaway, just the two us, lucky to be at that wonderful time of our lives when kids are grown and independent and we can tackle that very long list of "some days".

At the top of that list was Italy: 3 glorious weeks exploring all those magical places you see in movies and travel magazines and history books – Rome, Venice, Florence, Tuscany.

But perhaps most memorable was the four glorious days we spent in the small seaside villages of Cinque Terre on the Italian Riviera. Cinque Terre is comprised of five small villages perched precariously along the rugged cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Famous for its colourful houses of yellow, orange, pink and red stacked like building blocks above the sea, stories say that the houses were painted these brilliant colours so the fishermen could recognize their homes from the sea.

We arrived by train from Venice on a beautiful sunny afternoon in early October, arriving at Monterosso, the first of the five villages, and with a population of about 1000, the largest. Dragging our suitcases down the narrow street the two blocks to our hotel we were reminded once again that when travelling in Europe you really have to pack lighter! We found our hotel just off the main street and near the beach, a lovely boutique hotel run by an all-female staff.

The villages are all accessible by walking paths, local train, or by sea. There is minimal car access inside the area. The walking paths are very popular and connect all five villages, Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore.   Unfortunately a flood and slide in 2011 had closed much of the

paths so we travelled from village to village by local train, boarding the train at Monterosso and setting out for Riomaggiore, the last of the villages.

The train winds along with most of the journey being in tunnels. We spent the day travelling from village to village, wandering the hilly, narrow streets with their cafes, shops, and bars, exploring the historic ruins and seaside squares and stopping for the best freshly made gelato. Most people claim Vernazzo to be their favorite and we were no exception. The small village dates back to 1338 and appears to be built within the walls of an ancient castle and fortification. For the camera buffs, the scenery and colours of these picturesque villages offer unparrelled opportunities.

Having visited the villages by train, the next day we set out to experience them by sea, taking a ferry from Monterosso to Vernazza and Riomaggiore. The view of the villages perched colourfully on the cliffs as you approach from the sea was breathtaking. We hiked high up above the town of Vernazza and its ancient castle, looking over the colored houses and rooftops with views over the Mediterranean as far as the eye could see.

Here small, cozy restaurants spill into the streets basking in the autumn warmth, serving fresh locally grown produce and wines. The area is very industrious, carving terraces up the mountainsides on which they grow grapes and olives. Local wineries offer tastings, a casual experience in local bars where the proprietors proudly share their prized vintages.

Cinque Terre is definitely a gem, a step back to a time when the simpler things were valued and people shared with pride the results of their work. It is place with no corporate presence, no cars in the streets or fast food restaurants. A place where you can breathe in deeply the fresh clean air and hike high above the sea, or sip a glass of wine at a friendly street cafe. Romantic, relaxing and stunningly beautiful.

I know it is a place I will return again.

Cinque Terre is a rugged part of the coast of north western Italy situated in the Liguria Region. It is comprised of five small villages and form part of the Cinque Terre National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.