Volunteer Trip Report
Cinque Terre, Italy
October 7-15, 2026



Cinque Terre Volunteer Trip Report, October 2026
Conservation Projects in Italy's UNESCO Coastal Region

Executive Summary

In October 2026, Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) led a volunteer conservation trip in Cinque Terre, Italy, where participants contributed 208 hours to vineyard and hiking trail maintenance and grape harvest. Together with local partners and Cinque Terre National Park, our travelers helped preserve a UNESCO World Heritage cultural landscape. This report details the environmental impact, project outcomes, and volunteer experience.

Overview of the Conservation Project

ConservationVIP organized and led a volunteer trip to the village of RioMaggiore, in the picturesque region of Cinque Terre, Italy. In 1997 Cinque Terre was recognized and added to the UNESCO World Heritage List as a "cultural landscape." The seven travelers from the United States, including volunteer trip leader Tom Riley, and local guide Giovanna Prennushi from our Italy partner Mandala Tours, met in Florence, Italy to begin their volunteer trip.

Why Cinque Terre Needs Conservation Volunteers

Cinque Terre has a rich cultural heritage, reflecting centuries of human settlement and adaptation to the challenging environment. The hillsides are covered with terraced vineyards and olive groves, a traditional agricultural practice that has been maintained for centuries. When these stone walls deteriorate or collapse, it can lead to erosion, landslides, the loss of flora and fauna, and disrupt the livelihoods of local residents.

As a UNESCO World Heritage site, Cinque Terre National Park is committed to preserving its natural and cultural heritage. Efforts include sustainable tourism practices, protection of marine ecosystems, and maintenance of traditional agricultural methods. The park faces challenges such as managing tourist impact and environmental preservation, which are addressed through various conservation programs.

On this trip we had the privilege of contributing to the conservation of three different sites within walking distance of our hotel in RioMaggiore. As on past trips, we provided support to Azienda Agricola Possa (Possa), an organic farm and winery nestled within the Cinque Terre National Heritage Designation. This RioMaggiore property, spanning approximately 6 acres and overseen by Samuele “Heydi” Bonanini, is perched high above the beautiful Ligurian Sea. Heydi has played a significant role in the community by reviving the production of ancient wine and preserving the ancient dry-stone terraces, which serve as crucial defenses against erosion along the steep seaside cliffs. These terraces, some of which date back to the 10th century, are constructed with locally sourced stones and are meticulously maintained by hand.

We again provided trail restoration on the farm of Barbara Olcese and Stefano Catoni, Azienda Agricola I Foresti di RioMaggiore. Barbara and Stefano recently renovated a 500-year-old farm house that is traversed by one of the national park trails between the village of RioMaggiore and the upper road that connects the villages. Part of the charm of attending their cooking classes is the hike to the farmhouse, only accessible on foot, and the panoramic views it offers of the Cinque Terre coast. The very steep and ancient trail whose name was Loc Castagne, Place of the Chestnut Trees, is now referred to as Loc Costa Piaggio, the Piaggio Coast Trail. It is the only route that connects their farm to the village. Steep trails such as this are subject to significant storm wash which fills the steps with dirt and subsequently vegetation making the trail hazardous to navigate. Owning property within the Cinque Terre National Heritage Designation comes with the obligation to maintain any of the park trails that traverse that property.

In addition to these sites, we had the opportunity again to contribute alongside one of the trail crews of the Cinque Terre National Park (PN5T). We helped with a variety of tasks along the trails within the amphitheater surrounding Manarola. This opportunity was made possible by the collaborative effort of one of our Mandala guides, Giovanna Prennushi and PhD Geologist Dr Emanuele Raso of PN5T. The trails within PN5T receive about 4 million visitors a year, in contrast to the mere 4,000 inhabitants. There are not enough local

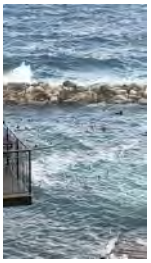
resources to keep up with the restoration efforts needed to protect the slopes from erosion, thus protecting the villages and the livelihoods of the residents.

Key Results and Impact (Quick Stats)
The volunteer group of 8 people (7 travelers, plus 1 local guide) completed 208 hours of volunteer time between three projects. Tools used during the week: Hand hoe/cultivators, soil knives, hand clippers, whisk broom, rakes.

Detailed Trip Report

Daily Summary:
Wednesday, October 7, Arrival
On the first day, the travelers met in the late afternoon in Florence, Italy for introductions, orientation and project briefings presented by the trip leader Tom Riley and local guide Giovanna Prennushi. Giovanna then led a stroll to Piazza Santa Maria Novella near the hotel and then down to the Arno River and Ponte Vecchio and circled back via the Uffizi Gallery and Palazzo Vecchio to arrive at a restaurant for a delicious dinner. Beginning at the introductions and continuing through our stroll and dinner, this group of people quickly bonded and gelled.





Thursday, October 8, Travel Day – Florence > Porto Venere > RioMaggiore
This morning, we had to wait over 30 minutes for our transport, due to a flat tire. Eventually, we boarded the private transportation van to embark on the journey to Cinque Terre. We also made an unscheduled stop in La Spezia for a restroom break. We stopped at Porto Venere, often considered the sixth village of Cinque Terre, and also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The weather was on-and-off rain, but it held off during our stop. As it was now lunch time, Giovanna led us to the restaurant where we enjoyed typical Ligurian dishes. Giovanna led us on a brief tour along the sea to see the Church of St. Peter, originally a site of pagan worship, and a wave crashing view of the Bay of Poets. We then circled back via the upper street of the village with its colorful container gardens and entryways, back through the wall of the city.

Then we again boarded the van to RioMaggiore, our home for the next week. After arriving and settling in at the hotel, the team discussed the following days volunteer projects and logistics. After that, we walked down into the village. We were treated to dramatic wave action in the port and a stunning sunset before sitting down to a delicious dinner of sea

bass and salad and pasta with pesto. Then we made our ascent back up to the hotel, discussing the sights and sounds of our first day and introduction to Cinque Terre.

Friday, October 9, Project Day 1 – Project at Azienda Agricola Possa
The morning was cool but sunny with a promise of a warm day. We would enjoy sunny warm weather for our entire time in RioMaggiore. We took a van to Heydi's vineyard. Heydi was there when we arrived. He gave an overview of his vineyard operations and restoration of the terraces and answered the group's questions. We met one of Heydi's team, Rodrigo, who indicated the terraces and walls that needed attention. We removed unwanted vegetation under the grape trellises on the terraces with hand tools and cut vegetation from walls with clippers. We collected the vegetation into large piles that Rodrigo carried away in tubs.





We broke at noon and enjoyed a delicious picnic lunch of salad, meats, olives, bread and cheese, followed by fruits, cookies and meringues. All provided by our local guide Giovanna. We ate in the shade of a building's porch with a pleasant breeze and lovely views, sharing our bounty with Rodrigo. We returned to our tasks after lunch and wrapped up when Rodrigo's day ended at 3:30.

Our team removed vegetation from about 1300 square feet of terrace as well as 300 feet of wall in the vineyard.

Giovanna then led a hike up to the Sanctuary high above RioMaggiore with amazing views of the sea and surrounding countryside before returning to the village via a different trail. We regrouped in the evening for a well-earned, delicious dinner.

Saturday, October 10, Project Day 2 – Conservation Projects at Azienda Agricola Possa and Azienda Agricola I Foresti di RioMaggiore
This morning we returned to Heydi's vineyard under brilliant sun and blue skies and continued removing unwanted vegetation from the terraces until noon. We split into teams with each carefully removing plant materials between the grape trellis and the edge of the terrace or between the trellis and the wall of the next higher terrace. We cleaned about 600 square feet of terrace and 150 feet of terrace walls. We also removed bindweed plants

from several very large herb plants (rosemary and sage) in the vineyard. The bindweed will cover and smother a plant it grows on, if unchecked.





We broke at noon and cleaned up and said our goodbyes to Rodrigo. From the vineyard, we then hiked over the hill and down the other side to Azienda Agricola I Foresti di RioMaggiore, Barbara Olcese and Stefano Catoni's farmhouse / cooking school.

After a warm greeting from Barbara and Stefano, Barbara led us in a lesson of pesto making by hand. We each were given a marble pestle and wooden mortar. Combining the basil, pine nuts, salt and olive oil into the proper consistency took time and muscle but we all did it. Barbara then gathered our pesto and went into the kitchen. It came back out on a tray of bruschetta and mixed with homemade pasta. Dessert was tiramisù and espresso for those who wanted. We ate heartily outside in the shade of a tent.







After lunch, we assisted Barbara and Stefano in cleaning the trail that leads to their home from the road above. Stefano used a trimmer to clear weeds while Barbara used power clippers and a small power saw to clear woody growth from the stone wall and along the trail to keep the trail wide and to allow more light to olive trees growing there. Using rakes, brooms and our hands, we moved the clippings and cuttings off the trail and swept steps of soil and loose stones. Several of us also picked up trash along the trailhead at the road

and into the trail itself. At the end of the day, we said “a domani” (see you tomorrow) and hiked down the steep trail from their home to RioMaggiore. This would be our project area tomorrow.

Overall, our combined tasks this day cleaned 245 feet of trail including 49 steps.

Sunday, October 11, Project Day 3 – **Azienda Agricola I Foresti di RioMaggiore**:
We took transportation to the trailhead above Barbara and Stefano’s and hiked down to their home. Our task today was to clear the trail and steps that lead past their house and down to the village.

Using our own tools and borrowing some from Barbara and Stefano, the group cleaned the trail from where we ended yesterday above the house and continued down the trail towards the village. Our project was the same before and after lunch - removing weeds and woody plants growing on the walls and the trail itself with clippers and removing washed in soil and loose stones from steps with hand tools, rake and broom. We also reset one step that had come loose.

Lunch came at noon. Barbara was teaching a cooking class, and we sat with the couple taking the lesson. They were from Germany and on their honeymoon. Our lunch included pasta with pesto, a tart filled with ricotta and local wild greens, and cooked apples over ricotta and mascarpone.

We cleaned and removed vegetation from about 420 feet of trail including 116 steps, cleaned 150 square feet of stone wall and reset one step.

At the end of our day, we bid farewell to Barbara and Stefano and thanked them for the delicious food!







Monday, October 12, Rest Day:
After several days of hands-on conservation projects, the group enjoyed a well-earned rest day. After breakfast, we all traveled by train to Monterossa al Mare, the northern most of the five villages. From there, one traveler chose to visit each of the five villages by train and rest his sore knee. The rest joined Giovanna for a hike to Vernazza, where we ate lunch, and then hiked to Corniglia, a total hike of about 5 miles. On the trail to Corniglia, a helicopter was delivering building material to a home. We had to wait for an OK and then hustle to avoid being under the helicopter and its dangling load. As it was another warm

day, the group took a break at a small, terraced farm along the trail and enjoyed juices and ices in the shade. After taking the train from Corniglia back to RioMaggiore and time for clean up, we gathered for another excellent dinner together.





Tuesday, October 13, Project Day 4 – Projects side by side with Cinque Terre National Park staff in Manarola and in the Possa wine cellar in RioMaggiore:
Today was our last volunteer project day in Cinque Terre and we split our day between two locations. In the morning, we traveled to Manarola by van and met our Cinque Terre National Park hosts Giulia, Davide and Simone. They lead us on a hike up and around part of the natural amphitheater in which Manarola sits. Along the way, Giulia discussed the Stonewalls for Life project to protect the man-made environment that reduces landslides and damage by weather. Davide and Simone discussed their efforts rebuilding and maintaining these trails and terraces. We stopped along the way to remove unwanted vegetation, cutting back plants that had grown into the trails and cleaned the steps.





We cleaned and removed unwanted vegetation from about 900 feet of trail including 31 stone steps.

As we hiked back into Manarola, Giulia had arranged for us to visit Gigi, a grower's, wine cellar. Gigi welcomed us and explained that he had bought land above RioMaggiore which

was not being maintained. He has since restored terraces and has made the vineyard productive again. He then opened a bottle of his wine and gave us all a taste. Upon hearing why we were in the Cinque Terre, he invited us to come and assist with projects on his terraces in the future.

We thanked Giulia, Davide and Simone. In Manarola, we ate a lunch of sandwiches, taralli, and fruit on the steps in the piazza. We then walked back to RioMaggiore on the Via dell'Amore, enjoying the sounds of the waves and a pleasant breeze.

Back in RioMaggiore, we entered the Possa wine cellar where Heydi ages wines in steel, ceramic and wooden vessels. Our task was to destem grapes for the Sciacchetrà wine common in this part of Italy. The grape bunches had been cut from the vine and left to dry slightly. This process gives the Sciacchetrà its unique flavor. Rodrigo was already there and he arranged chairs and tubs for the grapes. We sat in two groups putting grapes in the tubs and discarding stems in buckets. Heydi's mother joined us after a while.

After about 2 hours of picking, Heydi joined us to discuss and answer questions about maintaining the terraces, winemaking and marketing. He then shared Sciacchetrà with us to taste. He thanked us for our help during the week and we said our goodbyes.

We walked up to our hotel to clean up and rest before going back to the travelers' favorite restaurant for our final delicious dinner in RioMaggiore.

Wednesday, October 14, Travel Day:
The group packed up their belongings and thanked the staff at our host hotel for their excellent service and delightful breakfasts. We then boarded our van to embark on the journey back to the bustling city of Florence. Along the way, we made a stop at the Tuscan village of Lucca where Giovanna gave us an educational tour of the walled city, the Roman amphitheater and home of the well-known composer Puccini. Our lunch was an assortment of chickpea flour flatbreads and salad.

The walls that encircle the city of Lucca are among the best-preserved Renaissance walls in Europe. What's unique about the walls is that they were transformed into a public park in the 19th century, making them an integral part of the city's recreational and cultural life. The top of the walls is now a tree-lined promenade. We had time after lunch to stroll along the top of the walls to take in the beautiful panoramic views of Lucca and its surroundings.

After lunch we hopped back into our vans for the drive to Florence. After checking in to our hotel, we met for our trip debrief before walking to our last dinner together. After dinner,

Giovanna led us on one more stroll together viewing the Duomo and more of Florence at night.



Restoration Projects Completed:

- 208 hours over 4 days
- Project Day 1: Heydi's RioMaggiore vineyard
  - Removed unwanted vegetation from 1340 square feet of terrace using hands, soil knives, and hand hoes. This reduces competition for moisture and nutrients for 600 linear feet of grape trellis.
  - Removed unwanted vegetation from 2170 square feet (310 ft L x 7 ft H) of terrace walls using clippers to protect the integrity of the stone walls.
- Project Day 2: Heydi's Riomaggiore vineyard and Barbara's farm
  - Removed unwanted vegetation from 620 square feet of terrace using hands, soil knives, and hand hoes. This reduces competition for moisture and nutrients for 210 linear feet of grape trellis.
  - Removed unwanted vegetation from 1050 square feet (150 ft L x 7 ft H) of terrace walls using clippers to protect the integrity of the stone walls.
  - Removed aggressive rough bindweed from 3 large rosemary and 2 sage plants using clippers.
  - Removed vegetation from 180 square feet (30 ft L x 6 ft H) of stone wall along trail.
  - Removed trimmed grass, tree trimmings and accumulated from 170 feet of trail.
  - Cleared 49 stone steps of loose soil and stones covering 75 feet of trail.
  - Picked up and bagged roadside trash at the trailhead and along the trail where it paralleled the road for 75 feet in total.
- Project Day 3: Barbara's farm
  - Cleaned 428 feet of trail, removing unwanted vegetation, accumulated soil and loose stones, including 116 steps, using clippers, soil knives and hand hoes.

  - Removed unwanted vegetation from 150 square feet (30 ft L x 5 ft H) of wall using clippers.
  - Reset one loose stone step.
- Project Day 4: Cinque Terre National Park and Heydi's wine cellar
  - Removed vegetation from wooden handrails and along trailside for 902 feet of trail.
  - Removed loose soil, stones and unwanted vegetation from 31 steps.
  - Destemmed grapes for two hours.