

Untold Italy Episode 44 - Ciao Napoli

[00:01:00.070] - Katy

Buongiorno! Ciao to all our wonderful listeners, it's Katy here hosting the show today, and I'm so happy to have you here. Before we get started on today's show, I wanted to let you know that we'll be doing another listener Q&A session on next week's episode. Our first Q&A on Episode 39 was a great success, and so I thought we would do it again with another update on the travel situation in Italy as things are quite fluid, as we are finding in 2020.

[00:01:28.060] - Katy

So if you have a burning question about travel in Italy, we would love to hear it. Chances are that someone else is thinking about it, too. Don't be shy. We always love hearing from you and often learn lots from your questions too. You can send them into ciao@untolditaly.com. Or there will be a shout out on our Italy travel planning community on Facebook and our Untold Italy Facebook page too.

[00:01:56.050] - Katy

I'll put all the links to this and the contact details on the show notes for this episode, which is episode number 44. Make sure to send them in by Sunday, October the 20th, so we can answer them on the show.

[00:02:08.980]

Right. So on to today's show, which is all about Italy's third biggest city. And it's one that inspires adoration and perhaps some not so favorable opinions. And it is, of course, the city of Naples in southern Italy. I was lucky enough to be there almost a year ago. And I have to say it took me completely by surprise. I just loved its vibrant energy and mix of old and new. And if you're a fan of author Elena Ferrante's *My brilliant Friend* and the wonderful HBO series based on her novels, you can immediately recognize and I think experience the feeling of the city and some of the scenes in places where Lila and Lenu lived in the books.

[00:02:48.610] - Katy

Our guest today is Danielle Oteri, who in Episode 38 shared her love of the beautiful Cilento coast, not far from Naples. But Danielle also knows and loves Naples and has even written a guidebook about the city which actually references back to Elena Ferrante's books. You'll discover some marvelous curiosities, delicious foods and the locations of Ferrante's novels. Danielle also runs an Italian cooking wine and art community called *Feast on History* online, where members, which I am one of, access her incredible knowledge and contacts and learn all about the food, wine and history of southern Italy. I can't wait for you to hear about wonderful Napoli through her eyes.

[00:03:40.960] - Katy

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Ciao, Danielle, welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast,

[00:03:45.020] - Danielle Oteri

Ciao Katy.

[00:03:47.050] - Katy

Thank you for coming back. I'm so happy that you joined us today to talk about Naples, a city that I visited briefly last year for the first time. Shame on me. And I can't wait to get back there. Now, before we sort of dig into all the delights of this city, which there are many, should we just cut straight to the chase and bring up the elephant in the room? And that is perhaps Naples unfair reputation and why you shouldn't believe everything you read in the papers or online, for that matter.

[00:04:16.900] - Danielle Oteri

Absolutely. And thank you for having me back. So happy to be here. Yeah. Naples has suffered unnecessarily from this bad reputation that's left over from a few different things. And so the first thing I want to say to people is you've got to open your mind and get over it because it really, truly is full of stereotypes that are very, very outdated.

[00:04:41.140] - Danielle Oteri

So Naples really had a hard time recovering after World War Two. And in the in the years prior to World War Two, there was a lot of poverty in southern Italy. And so this was a place that a lot of people had left. So those years really kind of left a mark. A lot of it came from American soldiers returning back to the United States and and talking about this place that is really, really poor and had been decimated.

[00:05:08.320] - Danielle Oteri

And it really wasn't until, you know, I want to say like 70s, 80s, the 90s, that the city started to see a big resurgence. Now, Naples and southern Italy has also been plagued by mafia. Now there's mafia all over Italy and there's plenty of mafia in northern Italy as well. It's just a little more professional.

[00:05:29.050] - Danielle Oteri

But there was one incident in particular that really captured the media abroad. And that was a what we call a garbage crisis, that's how it was kind of framed that happened in about 2007/2008, where there was basically a sort of a standoff between the city and the mafia and garbage wasn't getting picked up. And the residents of Naples were just burning it because it was a mess.

[00:05:55.250] - Danielle Oteri

And my goodness, how international media ran with this story. Now I think that because like Mafia stories, The Godfather, these things are really popular, you know, sort of like pop culture in the imagination, you know, because of movies. Media tends to seize on any story in Naples that has to

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do with Mafia, so it kind of gets an outsized reputation for violence. And there are there are places all over the world that have problems. And certainly Naples has problems. New York has problems. I'm sure Sydney has many problems as well. But the ones in Naples seem to be particularly colorful and interesting to people.

[00:06:36.640] - Danielle Oteri

So there's also the problem that the infrastructure of the travel industry is designed to bring people on cruise ships, often into Naples, where they then put them on a bus, drive them right to the archaeological museum or right out to Pompeii, and then they go stay in Sorrento. So people that have been on sort of like cruises or have a bus tours get this impression that, like Naples is the city to avoid when really they are missing the very best part.

[00:07:08.050] - Katy

Oh, my goodness. They are. So I had the best time there. And on a personal note, we have wonderful guide there. And I'll give a shout out to GianLuca, who was from Withlocals. And I really asked him about these negative comments that the city gets. And he said it didn't really bother him when people say mean things about the city. But when they say mean things about the people, that it breaks his heart. And I have to say, oh, I just nearly lost it. And I did shed a little tear at that point. And yet it's really horrible to say mean things about people. But he said also that the people who might seem a little bit, you know, a little bit crazy because they live in the shadow of this volcano, it could explode at any point. And well, yeah, that's a fair point, actually. I'd probably be living for the moment, too. If I was under the shadow of the volcano.

[00:08:00.640] - Danielle Oteri

It definitely is. The way I like to describe Naples is it's kind of a functioning anarchy because it's it seems on the surface, depending on which neighborhood you're in and we'll talk more about this, that, you know, every neighborhood is very, very different. But it can seem on the surface that it's you know, it's busy, it's frenetic. It doesn't sort of visually make sense. It's such a mishmash of different architectural styles and.

[00:08:27.320] - Danielle Oteri

People kind of don't always obey the rules, but they do, and I think the classic example is crossing the street. So when you arrive in Naples, you see that there's not really a proper walk sign in most places in crosswalks, but you'll just notice people stepping out into traffic and then the car slowing down and so on. First impression, you think, well, this is how I'm going to die. And it seems to be, you know, just doesn't make any sense.

[00:08:54.620] - Danielle Oteri

So the first time I did that, I looked around. And I always tell this to people, find a rabbit, either find an older person or somebody pushing a baby carriage and just track them when they start to walk, walk with them. And then you very, very quickly pick up the rhythm of the city, which is that even though it seems like anarchy, people are actually really paying attention and are very considerate

of each other. You cross that crosswalk, if a car sees you there, they will slow down versus in New York. If you were to do that, somebody would mow you down and say, but you didn't have the lights. So I'm right and keep going.

[00:09:32.320] - Katy

Yeah, you've got to know the rules, rather the most important rules. But that's kind of the fun of it, too, I think, anyway.

[00:09:38.210] - Danielle Oteri

Absolutely. Yeah. And, you know, Naples is a frenetic city, so you have got to get into the rhythm of the city. You can't try to control things too much. You definitely have to let go and surrender to the city itself. It has a giant personality. I think it has the biggest personality of any other city in Italy. And you can't compare it at all to Florence, Venice or Rome. It is nothing like those cities.

[00:10:03.680] - Danielle Oteri

I mean, I think that's part of also sort of part of the negative stereotype is people have a very serene experience in Venice and a very intellectual experience in Florence. And it's a little more visceral in Rome. But there's also so much history there. And stuff that we're aware of in the popular culture to kind of tap into and museums to see like the Sistine Chapel.

[00:10:24.170] - Danielle Oteri

And then you go to Naples and there's plenty of cultural treasures, though people are less aware of them, but it's functioning anarchy again. That's all I can say. It is a city that is fully for the people that live there. And even though there are plenty of tourists, the attitude is you're in Naples. So come and do as we do in Naples. They don't adjust for you the way they do in Florence, Venice or Rome.

[00:10:49.940] - Katy

Yeah, good on them that's what I say. So if you're a first time visitor to Naples, or you're returning after a long time and you want to sort of get to the heart of it? Where would you start exploring the city?

[00:11:02.840] - Danielle Oteri

Well, each neighborhood is really, really different. And the area that people sort of see in their minds when they picture Naples are these very narrow streets that are draped with laundry that are usually images of the Spanish Quarter. And that is one really small part of the city. And that is where you will perhaps encounter pickpockets. That's a place where you want to watch your bag and be a little more careful.

[00:11:28.250] - Danielle Oteri

It's certainly worth seeing, but it's really just one very small part of the city. So there's one or two places, depending on how you want to roll. One is the historic center, the Centro Storico, which is

a UNESCO World Heritage site. And it is incredibly ancient. And understanding how it works really makes a huge difference. Naples was a Greek city. It's one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. So it was first settled by Greeks in the 6th century B.C. The bottom layer of the city is composed of Greek ruins and Greek systems. Then the Romans built right on top of that. Then you have the medieval city built right on top of that.

[00:12:10.940] - Danielle Oteri

So essentially throughout the centuries, the city was built up within a set of walls and like all walled cities, it was to keep out invaders and to keep out plague. And so they just kept building up, up, up, because Naples is so old. It's more layered than most cities, and so there the streets can be very narrow. They have a very Roman feel. So if you go to Pompeii and you see the market stalls, you walk through the marketplace and then you go to Naples, you're kind of having the same experience, except you're actually seeing all the things for sale and the people moving around and living above the stalls.

[00:12:48.500] - Danielle Oteri

So there's that and you have to see that. And there's so many interesting things to see within the central storico. But you can hear lots of Motorino buzzing around at night and people in Naples really know how to have fun. Like more than any other place in Italy. They are masters of having fun. So different piazzas. At night people gather in the piazza and they hang out and they talk and they drink beer. And so it could be a little noisy.

[00:13:14.720] - Danielle Oteri

Then the neighborhood where I usually like to stay is called Chiaia. And this is a very upscale, elegant neighborhood. So like everything in Naples, even something that's upscale is usually pretty affordable for travelers. And this is very close to the Lungomare, which is a beautiful boardwalk along the Bay of Naples, which is truly one of the most beautiful places in all of Italy, especially at sunset over the Bay of Naples. This is the view where Odysseus was said to have encountered the sirens. So since antiquity, this is one of the most beautiful views on Earth.

[00:13:49.340] - Danielle Oteri

And in the Chiaia neighborhood, you've got like the fancy stores. That's where you're going to find Prada and Ferragamo and big wide piazzas and lovely sort of covered areas outside where you can sit and have coffee and Aperol spritz and just hang out forever. It's where you're going to find also more international restaurants. Like this is the area you're going to go to if you want to have sushi, which sounds strange, but Naples is a seafood town and Naples also has this affinity for Japanese culture. So actually having sushi in Naples is great. And I just I just feel like it's a little more quiet and a little bit more elegant. So if you want to make sure you get a good night's sleep, stay in Chiaia.

[00:14:33.040] - Katy

Okay, that sounds like a good place to start. Where I actually started when we first went there was at the Castel Sant'Elmo. So we went up on the funicular and you get this amazing view down over the city and across to Vesuvius and wow, that was a big eye opener for me as well, just how it's all tucked into that little valley, you know, and sort of compact.

[00:14:58.940] - Danielle Oteri

That neighborhood is called the Vomero. And it's the newest neighborhood, I would say. You know, up until probably the late 70s, hundreds, early, eighteen hundreds, it was all farmland. And even the word Vomero refers to a particular kind of either a tool or a method of planting that they used to use there. And there's the Castel Sant'Elmo, there's also the monastery, the Certosa San Martino is there. And this is like a very posh, elegant neighborhood. And to me, it's a lot of Art Nouveau or what's called liberty style architecture. I always say, looks like Paris and Miami had a baby. It's got that beautiful Art Nouveau architecture and the big windows and the balconies. But then you've also got, you know, palm trees. So it's a really beautiful neighborhood and also a good place to get a good night's sleep. So a good place to get a BnB, you know

[00:15:55.550] - Katy

I was really surprised at and you sort of it's kind of like, I don't know, a sliding doors moment? You go down, you go up on the funicular and you're in a totally different world. Then you go down again and you're in this hustling, bustling neighborhood with these markets. And it was really cool, I loved it.

[00:16:13.670] - Danielle Oteri

Yeah. And the Neapolitans will tell you it's a completely different culture. You take the funicular and one of the spots where you can get it is right on the via Toledo, which is right next to the Spanish quarter and those narrow streets draped with laundry. And then you get up and then you go up the hill to Vomero and it's much more elegant. And, you know, it's definitely a different financial demographic and a different culture that goes along with it. And it's amazing that you can experience those two vastly different places within a ten minute train ride.

[00:16:49.930] - Katy

Yeah, it's really cool. So Naples is also a city of castles. So there's more than one castle, right? That's one. I think there's three or four isn't there?

[00:16:59.940] - Danielle Oteri

Oh yeah. This is it. Now you're speaking my language. So I came to Naples ... Even though my roots are Naples, this is where my family is. I first really visited Naples from Florence when I was a student, and then I wound up writing my master's thesis on one of the castles in Naples. And very little has been written about any of Naples really in English. That's starting to change, but very few English speaking scholars have written about it. The one I wrote about in particular is the one that everybody will see if they take the boats to go out to Capri or Ischia.

[00:17:36.060] - Danielle Oteri

I call it the Castel Nuovo, the New Castle, because I wrote about the period in the fourteen hundreds when it was taken over by the Aragonese, by the Spanish. But locals call it the mosquito Angelino referring to the Angioians who had it before and were the ones that built it in the twelve hundreds. And it's been renovated many times. But it's this really amazing kind of fairy tale Shrek looking castle and that it has this white marble Renaissance Arch that sort of plopped in between these two towers. It really just looks so medieval. It looks like it's out of a Minecraft game or something. And it seems so incongruous with the other architecture in the city. But that's really what Naples is about, is that there is so many different layers.

[00:18:26.190] - Danielle Oteri

The most prominent layer that you see is the Baroque era. Naples was really at its zenith in the seventeenth hundreds. And so that's when most of the palazzi that are painted these bright colors were built. And now a lot of them today are sort of peeling. And they look, they always say they look like older women who still have like really cool jewelry and clothes. They're just very old. And so the castles, the very medieval looking castles sort of fit.

[00:18:56.070]

They are juxtaposed right next to all of these baroque palaces. And so if your eye doesn't know how to sort through all of those things, it can just look like a jumble. But if you're an art historian like me, it's pretty cool. And then if you take a tour and somebody points it out to you; very quickly, you begin to learn how to read the city and you can cover six hundred years within one turn of your head.

[00:19:21.260] - Katy

Wow, that's amazing. I just love that, you know. In Australia here where I am in Melbourne, you can turn around and you maybe get one hundred years of history. One hundred and fifty. So, yeah, that's a big drawing point for Italy. And I know that is for many people as well. So there's a lot of great museums and that explore the history as well, isn't there?

[00:19:45.330] - Danielle Oteri

There's so many wonderful museums in Naples that are overlooked. The Capodimonte Museum is actually Italy's largest art museum. Most people think it's going to be Uffizi but it is tiny compared to Capodimonte. And that's where you'll find a lot of the Neapolitan Baroque. But you'll find a Caravaggio there. And Artemesia Gentileschi, a lot of the major famous works that are in your Art History 101 textbooks are there.

[00:20:10.380] - Danielle Oteri

The real jewel museum to me is the Archaeological Museum that was originally a military barracks for the Bourbon Kings in the seventeenth hundreds. And when they discovered Pompeii, which is only about 30 minutes outside of the city, they realized quickly that as they excavated all of these treasures, they were being stolen. And so they moved them into this military barracks in Naples.

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And over the years they accumulated so much stuff there was nowhere to move it. And so they transformed it into the museum.

[00:20:42.990] - Danielle Oteri

And it is a place where you will see, you know, like giant tour buses bringing people from the cruise ships will drop off. So in one moment, it can be really packed with people. But then the bus leaves and you've got that place to yourself and you've got just all the most extraordinary treasures from Naples, from Pompeii, excuse me, that are too delicate to be left on site. So specifically the mosaics. And it's really fun to put your nose right up to the mosaics, the Alexander Mosaic being the most famous. And then there is also the Farnese collection, which was a sort of inheritance of one of the Bourbon Kings. And there you have the Hercules, which is a very famous sculpture and just really this tremendous trove of Roman sculpture. To me, it's the best museum of classical art in the world. It's better than Rome and it's better than what you find in Greece.

[00:21:36.700] - Katy

It's a bit cool, and I haven't been there, but I really want to go. I love mosaics and just the intricate detail and the way that they build up those, you know, beautiful pictures. That sounds amazing. I can't wait to go.

[00:21:50.670] - Danielle Oteri

Oh, I mean, there's I mean that's only two and then you haven't even gone inside the churches, which are completely full of art. And there's about six hundred churches in Naples.

[00:22:04.260] - Katy

That's all?

[00:22:04.840] - Danielle Oteri

Yeah. Again, Naples being such a sophisticated city... The only city that rivaled Naples in the seventeenth century was Paris. Those were the two big cities, the most cultured, the most wealthy cities in Europe. And so every wealthy family, every semi wealthy family commissioned a church and. So they're everywhere. And some of them are kind of feral, there's nothing they're closed out there. There's no parish that's there anymore. Some of them have small groups of people who just volunteer to keep the place clean and open them up every once in a while so people can come in and see the art. Some of them are being transformed into contemporary art spaces.

[00:22:48.620] - Danielle Oteri

There is a group that does live Tableau vivant of Caravaggio paintings in some of these churches which are everywhere, and every one of them has extraordinary architecture. So the churches alone, I mean, this is sort of like my geek dream would be to really catalog each one because there's almost too many for them to be properly taken care of.

[00:23:17.660] - Danielle Oteri

And there's also lots of contemporary art Naples. It's a really vibrant city right now for contemporary artists. To me, I think Berlin was about 10, 15 years ago as a place that was really attracting international writers and artists. Naples is today because it's still a very affordable place to be. The weather's great, food is great, and there's a really wonderful culture for contemporary artists.

[00:23:42.000] - Katy

Yeah, and you can see that dedication to art in the modern sense when you go into the subway, can't you? They've done some amazing renovations of the subway stations.

[00:23:52.950] - Danielle Oteri

They have, yeah. And it seems surprising in a city that appears in many places to be so old to then go underground and see something very, very modern and another program of mosaics and contemporary art. And it functions really well. It's probably one of the better functioning public transportation city systems in Italy, ironically. And there's a new line. This is one of my favorite discoveries, recent discoveries and Naples.

[00:24:21.180] - Danielle Oteri

So what they're doing is connecting the train station with the port where people take the ferries out to Capri and Ischia, because right now it's kind of an awkward transport transfer there. You have to take a taxi and it seems like there should just be a clean line. So as they're building the subway line out to the port and the castle, my castle in particular Castel Nuovo. As they begin excavating, they found two Roman longboats with little shoes inside and the oars. And it was a tremendous project to excavate it and bring it out somewhere where it could be properly studied and eventually put on exhibition, which it's not yet. I don't know when that's going to happen, but it was really just so cool to see that in this process of sort of renovating and modernizing the city, they found this amazing archaeological discovery.

[00:25:17.370] - Katy

Wow. Yeah, I love this juxtaposition of old and new. I think it's really fascinating. And for me, to me, that is authentic. Italy, you know, I feel like people are always looking for the cute little villages and then just hanging out the washing. But the reality is most Italians living in cities and towns and they live side by side with history every day. And for me, that's that's the exciting bit, actually, how the old and the new mixes.

[00:25:45.840] - Danielle Oteri

Yeah. Neapolitans also just they all have sort of artistic souls. Even if they aren't specifically artistic, they really will often describe the city as one of the nativity scenes that you see. Naples is really famous for the Neapolitan Nativity where you have sort of a crumbling looking village with all of these figures around the image of Mary and Joseph in the manger with the Christ child. And all around Naples, you have these very elaborate nativity sets.

[00:26:13.320]

And then there's one street in particular that is dedicated to shops that sell the Nativity figures. But they really almost like imagine themselves as like the various characters within one of these nativity. So they see it as a beautiful city within that. They also recognize that the people are very much what makes the city and they celebrate all of it. It's also a place where people are just aggressively Neapolitan and they love being Neapolitan and they love sharing that with you. So it's not a place for chameleons. It's a place for people to be very, very proud of where they're from, which is what makes them really fun and what makes it a very warm culture.

[00:26:56.190] - Danielle Oteri

You know, people are just so happy to share with you what they do, what their city looks like, what they eat. And so it's definitely one of those cities that even though it's a big city and it's a modern city and there's a business district and people going to school and going to work and everything else, it's the city. It's the kind of city where people would wind up inviting you over for dinner.

[00:27:16.870] - Katy

Oh, lovely. Now the Nativity Street is actually amazing. And that was actually my favorite thing that I saw in Naples, because it is... You can't really describe it. It goes for maybe two hundred, maybe 100, 200 metres. And it's just lined with these shops that sell these teeny tiny little scenes of people. And either they're making bread or they even have the waterfalls and mills and tiny things that go to be built up to make these huge nativity scenes. It's really cool, actually.

[00:27:52.720] - Danielle Oteri

Yeah. There's all these stock characters and it's really they have a figure for sort of every slice of life you have, like the cheesemaker and the shoemaker and all of these characters. Now, there's there's one place, this is a good tip for you. So there's San Gregorio Armeno, which is the name of the street where all the Nativity artisans are and a lot of that stuff.

[00:28:12.870] - Danielle Oteri

And, you know, some of it is for the tourists. But there's a shop that's very close by that street, but not on that main street. And it's called in English Neapolitan Sacred Art. That's actually the name of the shop in English by Fabio Paola, who's the owner. And it's Fabio and his wife. They make all of this stuff by hand, so they sort of inherited.. Fabio in particular, was taught the craft by somebody who had done it for generations. And he emphasizes that, you know, creating these figures, the sculpture, the painting, this all has to be taught you over a very long period of time.

[00:28:48.640] - Danielle Oteri

He also has the moulds to make things like The Flaming Heart, which is a religious symbol. So he has these objects for sale, for religious purposes and a lot of his clients are churches around the world, monasteries or convents, but he also sells the stuff as kind of as a kind of contemporary objects. So I have these cool necklaces of theirs - The Flaming Heart, which is a religious symbol, but it's just kind of like kind of a cool, funky chain. And it looks really contemporary and

fashionable whenever I wear it. But it's really made with from one of the historic designs. So I like the fact that he's kind of updated this craft very much rooted in its history and with a lot of pride for the craftsmanship and the lineage. But a lot of his clients are also interior designers from all over the world that are just sort of looking for kind of more interesting, historic and edgy imagery.

[00:29:47.620] - Katy

Oh, very cool. I've just Googled it. And it kind of reminds me of Alessandro Dari in Florence, actually, but it's obviously got that real Neapolitan flavor. Very cool.

[00:30:01.990] - Danielle Oteri

Compulsively Neapolitan, as I say

[00:30:03.870] - Katy

I love it. Right. So if we do a lot of this exploring museums, we're going to get hungry, aren't we? And you're in the right spot.

[00:30:14.580] - Danielle Oteri

There is no better place to eat than Naples. First of all, it is so affordable, so affordable. I mean, if you don't have a lot of money, just go to Naples. So pizza, of course, is the most famous export. And this is why I always think it's funny when people know Florence, Venice, Rome, but not Naples. I'm like pizza. Come on. Naples lives large in our popular culture around the world.

[00:30:41.410] - Danielle Oteri

So there is a pizzeria on every corner in Naples and you know, locals will have very sharp opinions about them. I will say from an outsider's perspective, and I come from New York, which is a good pizza town, so I have good standards. But nonetheless, every pizza in Naples is good. Even the pizza you get across the street from where you get off of the cruise ships is good. But then there are some that are extraordinary and life changing.

[00:31:08.080] - Danielle Oteri

And you can't believe that this food that you've had a million times can actually taste so good. My favorite is one that's called 50 Kalò, and it's in a neighborhood called Mergellina, which is one of the more upscale neighborhoods. And you often have to wait on line to get in. No problem.

[00:31:29.770] - Danielle Oteri

Don't worry about reservations in Naples. Just hang outside and watch the street theater. It's part of the experience. Neapolitans tend to eat dinner very late too. So if you go, at seven o'clock when they open, you usually can go right in. But this is truly life changing pizza. They're very meticulous about what kind of flour they use, where the wheat is grown. Every little detail has been considered and resolved and you'll have the most incredible culinary experience and then you'll wind up paying like ten euro for the pizza. Really incredible.

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[00:32:07.110] - Danielle Oteri

And then you have you know, it's a seafood town. Pasta and seafood is really what you want to eat in Naples wherever you go. So one of the fun things to do is also go to the food markets. Even if you're not food shopping, there's Pignasecca market. There's the Porta Nolana market, which is sort of near one of the ancient city gates of the city. And you'll see the seafood vendors with just giant bowls of clams and swordfish. And it's so picturesque. I mean, you just take pictures the entire time. It's an Instagram feast.

[00:32:42.040] - Danielle Oteri

But pasta and seafood of any kind. And then Naples is also really I would say Naples and Palermo are both rivals for pastry. They are both port cities, obviously, but they were also the places where you had the castles, the main palaces for the Bourbon Kings. And the main palace was in Naples. But they also had a secondary one in Palermo. And the Bourbons were deeply connected with the French and French pastry chefs and cooks who came to the city to cook for the royals. So that's why you have this really amazing pastry tradition. It's like marrying French technique with Italian ingredients.

[00:33:23.590] - Danielle Oteri

And the most famous pastry in Naples is called the sfogliatella, which is really difficult to make. I mean, you just need to get it done by a proper pastry maker, but it's basically a flaky pastry that's wrapped around sweetened ricotta cheese that's flavored with a little bit of almond, either almond water or orange blossom water. And there are two places in particular that are pretty much across the street from each other that are rivals. One is called Pintauro, which has been in business since the seventeenth hundreds, and the other one is called Sfogliatella Mary. And especially on Sunday, you'll see Neapolitans lining up to get one. And I like Mary, that's my personal favorite. But you can't go wrong. You can't have a bad pastry Naples.

[00:34:10.450] - Danielle Oteri

Well, I think we went there. It was really good. Yeah. I love all those little layers of pastry. That's the key to it, isn't it? It's like layer upon layer upon layer and a bit crunchy on the outside, warm and soft on the inside.

[00:34:25.060] - Danielle Oteri

I tried to make them recently and it was a complete disaster. But it was really interesting. It was like, you know, kind of really appreciating the process. But you have to basically put you have to roll out dough very thin and very long and then brush it with butter or lard, the old school ways to do it with lard. So it almost has even a kind of a faint bacon taste. And then you have to sort of then wind it together very tightly in a cone, stuff it with the cheese and then bake it at just the right temperature. It's very, very temperamental. Definitely for skilled hands. And even in the train station at Naples, you can get a pretty good one.

[00:35:02.380] - Katy

Yeah, that's what you want to be doing. I actually went down there for a food tour that was a like of food and culture tour. And I At the sfogliatella point, I was kind of asking for mercy because there was so much food and it was all amazing. But what I love about Italian food as well and just the whole culture of eating in Italy is the concept of digestive. And one of the best digestives is coffee. And Neapolitan coffee is amazing too

[00:35:32.350] - Danielle Oteri

It is, it's famous. Even Italians themselves are actually probably some of the worst perpetrators of that bad, incorrect, outdated stories about Naples people from northern Italy love, love to make fun of Naples. But the one thing that they will always concede on is the coffee. So yeah, yeah, you're right. But the coffee is really the best there.

[00:35:58.270] - Katy

And they have these fancy cafes, don't they, where you can go and just experience that atmosphere as well, you know, these elegant kind of cafes that you maybe you don't expect in Naples.

[00:36:08.980] - Danielle Oteri

The most famous one is called the Cafe Gumm Breena's, which is right across the street from the Opera House, the oldest opera house in Europe. It's not La Scala, it's San Carlo. And yeah, it's a very elegant cafe that feels like really like you're stepping back in time. The waiters have on bow ties, and little white jackets. So there you can sit and pretend that you are a 19th century intellectual. But also what I love is that there are lots of places, restaurants that don't have a coffee machine, don't have a proper espresso machine.

[00:36:39.850] - Danielle Oteri

But if you want a coffee, the coffee bar that's right nearby will bring it to you. So you'll always see this. And it can be kind of curious if you don't know what's going on. You'll see usually a young man with a tray and they always give you a little bit of water to cleanse your palate after the coffee as well. A little bit of bubbly water. Now crossing the street.... Even if you're sitting along the lungomare looking at the Bay of Naples right on the water itself, all of a sudden you'll see people crossing over with coffee that they're bringing to people. They're sitting right there on the beach. And so this idea of fresh coffee, really well done, no matter where you are, is important. There's no such thing as grabbing a cup of Starbucks and running.

[00:37:24.550] - Katy

Oh, that would be a real shame, wouldn't it?

[00:37:27.090] - Danielle Oteri

Yeah, it would never fly in Naples. If it's working in Milan, it'll work in Rome. It will never work in Naples.

[00:37:34.160] - Katy

Oh thank goodness for that. But I just love the idea that, you know, of these people just rushing over the street with your coffee, it's just so civilized.

[00:37:43.000] - Danielle Oteri

So civilized. Yes. I mean, it's just the idea, too, that this is something special and should be done properly and care and attention. It deserves care and attention. And Naples is also the the home of what's called the cafe sospeso, the suspended coffee. And the tradition actually began at the Cafe Gambrinus. And it's essentially like a like a bucket on the table where you put in money for you to basically buy an extra cup of coffee by putting the money in the bucket. And the idea is that if somebody can't afford a cup of coffee, they're still a human being who deserves to have a proper cup of coffee. So it's like you paid it ahead of time and someone can just come in and ask for a cafe sospeso.

[00:38:28.240] - Katy

Oh, that's lovely. We should all just be buying people coffee these days. I think it's a great idea.

[00:38:34.900] - Danielle Oteri

It's such a little thing and it means a lot. Yeah.

[00:38:37.960] - Katy

No, I love it. I love it. I love Naples. And also you can get the limoncello which is very important to digest.

[00:38:47.680] - Danielle Oteri

But yeah, Italians in general are really kind of obsessed with and intelligent about their digestion in that they eat the vegetables last. In the United States if you go to a restaurant, you will get your salad first, which makes no sense. But one thing I also like about Naples is that around five o'clock I like to call it pastry o'clock, you will see people leaving work, walking home, and they often have a pastry in their hands. So you kind of eat dessert first in Naples.

[00:39:16.110] - Katy

Yes, I'm living for that. And I'm quite partial to a rhum baba and I had a good one there too. Oh my God. Like literally this is when I was saying, no! The guy was saying rhum bab. And I was like, oh no, I need the rhum baba.

[00:39:32.940] - Danielle Oteri

Yeah. That's really an artifact of the Bourbon period, the French period. Also it's a pastry that is soaked in rum and Popella. That's the very best place. This is in an area of the city called the Sanità, which is probably like the most it's more like the most traditionally poor neighborhood. But I would compare it to how the East Village used to be in New York, where it was like the Bohemian neighborhood. It's becoming cool. And a lot of people are really buying apartments and Airbnb-ing

things there. And Popella is this pastry shop in that neighborhood that you must go to for a proper rhum baba.

[00:40:11.670] - Katy

Well, delicious. Speaking of the sort of more working class neighborhoods. So a lot of people have rediscovered Naples true Elena Ferrante's books. And as I mentioned at the start of the show, Danielle has actually written an amazing guide and she also runs tours in Naples or around her novels. It's like you can actually envisage yourself there. Light bulbs keep going off and you really feel like you you have stepped into one of those novels, actually. And do you think that those novels reflect Naples as it is today?

[00:40:51.930] - Danielle Oteri

They do and they don't. I would say one of the reasons I was so enamored with the books and beyond the fact that I love the books because they're tremendous works of literature. I was so happy when they became popular because it became an excuse to introduce people to Naples. It was very hard to get people past their preconceived ideas about the city being dangerous. But then they became deeply curious about the city because the city is almost a character. And I felt that I had a deeper understanding of the books because I understood the different neighborhoods that they were set in, that Ferrante had set different scenes in. So. I think a good comparison is saying the Ferrante books are a bit like a tale of two cities where you can have two neighborhoods which are physically very close to each other, but culturally very, very distant. And that is still very much the case today.

[00:41:43.460] - Danielle Oteri

We were talking before about the Vomero and how it's a completely different culture from the top of the hill down to the via Toledo. So you really see that when you visit these neighborhoods and truly understand the trajectory, especially think of the character of Elena of Lenu and how she's really navigating these different neighborhoods almost as a different person, how she has to change her accent and change her demeanor.

[00:42:09.770] - Danielle Oteri

So the neighborhood where the books are primarily set is just on the other side of the train station. It's called Rione Luzzatti and it's a very working-class neighborhood. It was built up in the nineteen fifties as almost like public housing as a place for a lot of rail workers to live in very functional apartments. Not very picturesque, but at the time that the stories are set and you really see this in the films, it was like kind of in the middle of nowhere because it was sort of outside of the proper city center.

[00:42:41.930] - Danielle Oteri

Now the area is referred to as the ponds in the books is really built up. They joke and call it a mini Manhattan. It's a bunch of skyscrapers that were actually designed by a Japanese architect because Neapolitans love the Japanese. And so it's now it's not in the middle of nowhere anymore.

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[00:42:59.450] - Danielle Oteri

But you do still have the sense and I've taken many groups there, we have a wonderful local guide named Francesco who always guides us there. You visit the library, visit the church, and you walk along the street they call the stradone in the books that, yeah, this is like its own little world. And if you don't leave this neighborhood - and this is the case, I think, for poor neighborhoods around the world, you know, the world beyond is a completely different world than the world of that neighborhood and the dynamics, the social dynamics that rule there.

[00:43:28.850] - Danielle Oteri

But then I what I love then is to immediately take people. I take them on a little bus to the neighborhood where the shoe store in the novels is set, which is in the Chiaia area. So the more upscale neighborhood I mentioned at the start, and it's called the Piazza di Martiri and it's really beautiful and really elegant and right by the bay. Right by the lungomare. And you really see like what a different world these characters would transcend within one day going back and forth. And I just feel like it gives you such a deeper understanding of them, a different texture to the reading.

[00:44:05.860] - Danielle Oteri

And people on the tours... I have always felt like they were referring to the characters as though they were real people like, oh, so this is where Lila would have done this. This is the library where that happens. It feels very visceral.

[00:44:20.510] - Katy

Yeah, it's that contrast. It's just layer upon layer in Naples. And I think that's what those books have really uncovered as well. Like you, as you say, there's just such a contrast between those two neighborhoods and then there's a contrast between just the architecture and everything that's going on around you. And it just makes for a really delightful experience, I think. And if you haven't read Elena Ferrante's books, then do go ahead. I'll put a link to them on our site. So I actually read her whole Neopolitan, put it in the space of two weeks and I had to slow myself down.

[00:44:59.900] - Danielle Oteri

Also the theme that's in the book, you know, for those who haven't read it, just briefly, there's a pivotal scene right at the beginning of the book where the the two girls lose their dolls in an underground grate and sort of have to go down into this basement to retrieve them.

[00:45:15.290] - Danielle Oteri

And it sort of sets off this whole course of events that spans over the four books and this sort of engagement that you have with the underworld in those books, I feel is so reflective of the city. And the tour that I always take people on and I always recommend other people to take is a tour called the Naples Underground. And there are different entry points around the city and different versions of the tour that you can take. But you physically go down deep into the city and see the

Greek systems and walk along the Roman amphitheatres all below the city. It's very cool. Bring a jacket.

[00:45:48.620] - Danielle Oteri

And this is also a place where people hid during the bombings during World War Two. So this is kind of almost how the under layer of the city was fully or formally discovered. Once you've done that and you've walked through the layer cake of the city, you understand the city, but then those books have a totally different resonance.

[00:46:13.650] - Katy

Yeah, I think exploring underground and then you've got the ancient history, you've got Baroque on top, it's all coming together. It's not a mishmash. It's more, it's just it's a mixture. And it's it's quite heady and exciting, really. Well, I find it exciting anyway. And then when you get above ground, just it's just throbbing, isn't it? It's just like a pulsating beat and people just mixing together, going about their business, standing on the street corner, having some pizza. There's buskers nearby, someone singing opera. Why not?

[00:46:47.070] - Danielle Oteri

Yeah, it's an intensely social, extroverted city. And I am an introvert, but there's something about the area there. I, I just feel completely supercharged when I'm there. I feel very comfortable. It's one of the places where I just I feel like a different person. I feel like my cells rearrange themselves. So I guess I just really feel so very, very alive in a way that I don't feel in other places. I live in New York and I live in a big, crazy city, but it's a different feeling there. And I think the difference is, is that there's a really wonderful emphasis on humanity.

[00:47:23.670] - Danielle Oteri

And even though it's a city and again, the city is where people go for work, you know, a lot of people come to Naples for financial reasons. This is where the big hospital is. This is where the university is. There's still such an emphasis on the Neopolitan character, the history, what people eat, how people act and think.

[00:47:44.880] - Danielle Oteri

I always think a good example is I have a friend who is a voice coach for Broadway singers and within the music industry. He says that nobody ever really needs to coach Neapolitans to sing properly. Like the way they speak... Their voice is completely calibrated for singing, for singing on a stage. So it's full of life and it can be intimidating. But again, I think you just have to sink in. And then I also say, you know, for some people it is too much. It is overwhelming and that's OK, too. But that doesn't necessarily mean that it's a dangerous place but it is it is an overwhelming place, I will say that.

[00:48:25.110] - Katy

Yeah. I guess, you know, if you're wanting to go away to have an escape, , you can have that quieter experience out in the countryside or on the coast. But if you want a big jolt into your senses, that actually can be life changing along with that mozzarella and that pizza that is, it's such a great place to go. And, you know, I think I'll be definitely seeking it out again as a priority, to be honest, because I feel like I could stay there maybe five days more easily, easily to explore.

[00:48:59.340] - Danielle Oteri

Oh, there's so much to see. I mean, I go several times a year and I'll spend a week or two at a time and I feel like I've barely scratched the surface. There's so much to see there. And, you know, it's always been a place that's been known for the things that I've described today too. In Roman antiquity, the area Campania, the region of Campania was called Campania Felix - Happy Countryside, because the Romans used to like to go to Naples to have fun because it was always inflected with Greek culture. Even the name Napoli comes from Neo Polli, which means new city in Greece. It was a Greek colony at its founding.

[00:49:35.610] - Danielle Oteri

And so this was where conservative, austere Romans were very concerned with business and work would go to have a good time. They would go to the Vesuvius coast and they always referred to Naples as a place to have a good time. And then in the Renaissance or the late Middle Ages, Boccaccio, who's famous for writing the Decameron, went to law school in Naples, to a very, very old university there and recounts that these were the most fun years of his life.

[00:50:05.400]

So even Florentines, when they are being taken in about Naples, will have to concede that Boccaccio said that it was the best place, the place where you have the most fun.

[00:50:16.680] - Katy

Oh, let's go. I just want to go back now. Let's go have some fun this year. Absolutely. Where would you go... I think I do know the answer to this question, but I'm going to ask you anyway, what's your favourite place in the city to go to? That sort of sums up Naples apart from the Castel Nuovo, because I knew you would say that.

[00:50:41.070] - Danielle Oteri

I've got to go check in with my castle whenever I'm there. Oh, gosh. That is that is so hard to say. There's so many different experiences. Um, you know, I like to just kind of take, when I first got there, I like to take a walk across what's called Spaccanapoli, which is the street if you see it like at Google view from overhead, it it cuts a straight line down this otherwise chaotic city. And so if you walk along there, you can get an amazing sfogliatella, you can pick up a really good pizza. There's also.. I love the frito misto, which is a cone of either fried seafood or fried dough or fried vegetables like zucchini and eggplant, you could do some shopping. And then if you go all the way to the end, you come eventually to the Cathedral of San Gennaro.

[00:51:33.770] - Danielle Oteri

And San Gennaro is the patron saint of Naples and kind of really the heart of the city. So I always like to tell the story, which I think is perfectly emblematic of Naples and why you need to go see the cathedral. I was traveling in Naples with my mother in law, who is from northern Italy and likes to spread all of the stereotypes about Naples and she was being quiet.

[00:51:59.270] - Danielle Oteri

But I could tell, you know, she sort of had a face on, like she's looking around. She was kind of looking down on things. And we were actually in a car, in a taxi about to go to the airport. And the cab driver turns around, he hears her accent. He reads the situation perfectly and he says, Have you been to San Gennaro? She says, No, I haven't. Turns off the meter on his cab. And he's like, I'm not letting you leave Naples until you see our cathedral.

[00:52:26.540] - Danielle Oteri

And so he drives us there. He parks the car in front of the cathedral. He says, go take your time. We left the bags inside the cab for all these people that are worried about being having their things stolen. We left everything inside. The cab was no problem, the guy. So I went to go to the coffee bar to get a coffee. And even if you're not a religious person, I'm not. There's something about this cathedral, the history, the fact that it's such a character in the city itself, it's just very overwhelming experience. This is where there is kept a vial of San Gennaro's blood, which liquefies several times a year, but specifically on September 19th. And this is considered to be a fortunate sign. If it liquefies, it means that Vesuvius will not explode. If it doesn't, then we're in trouble and o it's kind of like the pagan the sacred, the profane. Everything about the city kind of comes together in this cathedral. So take that walk across Spaccanapoli, go to San Gennaro. And if that's the only thing you do in Naples, you've at least experienced its heart.

[00:53:31.860] - Katy

Oh, let's do it. Let's do it. I hope that blood liquefied for us this year.

[00:53:39.440] - Danielle Oteri

It did. It did. I was actually paying attention to this. I woke up and it was the first thing I did. I went to Twitter and I was like did the blood liquefy? And it did

[00:53:51.860] - Katy

Oh my gosh, we need all the luck we could get, right now.. so look, I think everyone can now understand that Naples is a lot more than some silly stories about, very old stories about garbage. And if you want to know some more about Naples and really just tap into Danielle's amazing knowledge, how can our listeners stay in touch with you and join in that Southern Italian fun?

[00:54:27.810] - Danielle Oteri

Feastonhistory.com is my website, and we have an online community now where we're doing lots of different interactive programs, wine tastings, food tastings, art history classes. And Naples is

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prominently featured in the art history series. That's a part of the program which I run. And being that my specialty as a scholar is Naples, I'm leaning pretty heavily on that.

[00:54:50.990] - Danielle Oteri

But in general, there are there's not a lot of, there's not a lot of good quality information about Naples in general in guidebooks. But if you contact me also, I would put you in contact with my network of guides in Naples who are among the best tour guides in Naples, who are very passionate about their city and extremely well educated. So if you, it's going to be more than a tour. It's really going to be a new friend that you've met who who's introducing you to their favorite place.

[00:55:20.630] - Katy

Wonderful. So if you want to immerse yourself in southern Italian food, wine history and culture, then please go ahead and check out Danielle's community based on history. I'm actually a member myself, and I really look forward to seeing you there. Grazie Danielle and thank you for coming on the show to enlighten us about Napoli. I hope some of our listeners think twice about rushing through and make some time to discover this truly amazing city.

[00:55:45.680] - Danielle Oteri

Thank you so much, Katy.

[00:55:48.410] - Katy

Now, you may have heard the saying "See Naples and die" by German poet Goethe, and what he meant was that you must see Naples before you die because it is such a magnificent city. I am so grateful to Danielle for sharing her Napoli with you. I can't tell you just how exciting that place is. It's definitely one to put on your bucket list if you have one.

[00:56:09.230] - Katy

I put all the details of the places Danielle mentioned into the show notes at UntoldItaly.com/44 for episode 44. There you'll also find details of how you can join her online community - Feast on history, where you can access classes on food, wine and Italian culture. I am inspired to make some stuffed zucchini flowers thanks to the recipe on there. They just need to come in season here. It's not long now.

[00:56:35.510] - Katy

As I mentioned at the start of the show next week, we're going to do a question and answer session for you, our listeners. Please send your questions for you to [ciao@Untold Italy.Com](mailto:ciao@UntoldItaly.Com) by Sunday, October the 25th, so we can answer them on the show.

[00:56:49.700]

Thanks for listening to Untold Italy Travel podcast. As always if you've enjoyed the show, do leave us a rating or review. This helps bump us up to the top of feed on Apple and other podcast apps so we can reach more people with our love of Bella Italia. That's all for this week. Ciao for now.

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