

Untold Italy Episode 49 - Fabulous Florence finds

[00:00:59.970] - Katy

Buongiorno! Ciao to all our wonderful listeners, it's Katy hosting the show today, and I am so happy to have you here still dreaming of Italy. I know winter in the northern hemisphere may be looking a little bleak, but there are sunnier days on the horizon. I can just feel it. Meanwhile, let's stay positive and continue our journeys around Italy, picking up those tips and tidbits of inspiration that add richness and delight to our travels.

[00:01:27.030] - Katy

It's absolutely the best way to spend this season, and that's what we plan to do over the coming weeks over on our membership group, Untold Italy Insiders. We've had such a fun month trying chianti, learning about Pompeii and Rome and making eggplant parmigiana. A big shout out to all our Untold Italy insiders, members, and especially to Cassie, who shared her delicious version of eggplant parmigiana, which was devoured by her four children. You've really got to love it when the kids don't need encouragement to eat vegetables.

[00:02:00.030] - Katy

Coming up next month on Insiders, we're getting a little Christmassy and trying Prosecco, cooking seafood and learning about Florence, as well as one of Italy's royal palaces, which is in fact the largest in the world and was modeled on the Palace of Versailles in France. So, as you can imagine, it is not plain at all. We'd love you to join us. Just go to untolditaly.com/insiders for all the details of how to sign up at the founding members price, which is valid only until the end of this month, which is November 2020. There are options for monthly and annual membership, so you can choose the one that's best suits you. As I said, the price will go up in December, so now's the time to join us at that special price.

[00:02:46.550] - Katy

Now, speaking of Florence, I am so excited to introduce you to this week's guest. One of the many, many privileges of this job is that I am able to meet some incredibly talented people, many of whom I have an instant connection with.

[00:03:02.310] - Katy

Corinna Cooke is the author of the Glam Italia series of guidebooks, which, in her own words, are the stories and discoveries of a regular person who happens to travel a lot and loves to experience more than just the main tourist attractions. Glam Italia books are a different way of looking at travel from the main style of guidebooks out there. They are really fresh and fun. And now I mentioned to Corinna, and I don't mind sharing with you either, that the success of her writing really gave me the confidence to start out on my own style of writing and this podcast.

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[00:03:33.810] - Katy

So she definitely was an inspiration for Untold Italy. Like me, Corinna's love of Italy was sparked by a wonderful teacher, and it has taken her on adventures all over the country, uncovering interesting finds and of course, eating only the very best gelato. Corinna also runs a boutique small group tours for women in Italy, and I am thrilled to introduce her to you today to talk about Florence, which is the latest in the Glam Italia series. Ciao Corinna! Benvenuta, and welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

[00:04:07.310] - Corinna Cooke

Hi, Katy, how are you?

[00:04:09.530] - Katy

I'm great, thank you. I was just telling our listeners in the introduction a little bit about you and that reading your book, Glam Italia was one of the inspirations for this podcast. It really was.

[00:04:27.470] - Katy

I just liked your writing style and yeah, it's easily accessible, but you pack a lot of punches in terms of the detail. So I really appreciated that. But I wanted to know, can you tell our listeners your story in your own words and how you came to fall in love with Italy and Florence?

[00:04:45.260] - Corinna Cooke

Yeah, well, so I grew up in New Zealand. Moved to live in London to go to makeup school and my main career, my whole life has been being a makeup artist. And so I've traveled around the world with that. And when I was living in London, I did my first foray into Europe was a Contiki tour, and it was so funny now, but it was a bus tour full of 18 to thirty five year olds. And it was all like Kiwis and Aussies and South Africans and a couple of Americans and Canadians and people who were young and and couldn't have put together a trip like that.

[00:05:24.440] - Corinna Cooke

And it was fantastic. It was so much fun. And for the longest time it was actually the best six weeks of my life. But we so we started off... We had like the most horrendous crossing across the North Sea, which is where we started, we landed in the Netherlands and then went down through France and down through Spain and then back through the Riviera. And everything was good. Like I saw all these great things and really enjoyed it.

[00:05:52.840] - Corinna Cooke

But then we rolled into Italy and I felt it, if you know it, just like everything started thrumming inside of me. What is this place, it's so incredible. And so for the rest of my life, Italy was the place. I've been to many, many, many, many countries. But nothing's ever made me feel the way Italy made me feel. And I've traveled my whole life. And at some point I just decided, well, I don't really want to waste more time and going and seeing new places. I want to get back into Italy to dive into it.

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[00:06:28.310] - Katy

I can relate. I can relate. It's really it's such a special place and there's just so many layers to uncover. And I just love hearing the stories about how people have found it, because I think it's very similar to myself. I don't know if I mentioned this, but I had a teacher when I was in school who really unraveled the history for me. And that really grabbed me. And that's why when I started seeing the places that I'd read about, it started building even more interest for me.

[00:07:02.620] - Corinna Cooke

Oh, absolutely. And it's great when you can have that one person at some pivotal point in life that changes the course of it, that introduces you to something that that you might have otherwise missed. I mean, I had a high school art teacher, history teacher who... She had this long red hair that she wore pulled back in a ponytail and she wore gypsy skirts that kind of moved when she did. And she taught history of art. And it was great when she got onto teaching about the Italian Renaissance art, this thing happened in her.

[00:07:34.960] - Corinna Cooke

And I could see her just this was her great passion in life. And she was so effusive and so dynamic and passionate when she talked about it that it just like washed right over me and I became equally enthused. And that also propelled me into Italy because I had kind of background knowledge that she was so excited and I was so excited and have been around the world to see basically every painting she ever mentioned.

[00:08:02.630] - Katy

Oh, well, we're going to talk about Florence today. And it's interesting because my history teacher taught us Renaissance history and she at the end of our class, at the end of school, which was our final year of school, we sort of all had such an interest in the Medici and particularly Cosimo and Lorenzo for some reason. But she she actually did a whole feast for us in her home. And she created all these dishes from the era and she made us dress up and stuff. It was just yeah, it was really cool in a nerdy kind of way. But I love that.

[00:08:43.810] - Corinna Cooke

I love it. And it's important because you've remembered it. Absolutely.

[00:08:48.940] - Katy

Yes. So many years have passed

[00:08:52.540] - Corinna Cooke

but it's creating experiences and memories and that's what it's all about

[00:08:57.130] - Katy

I think so. They're things that you hold onto. You may not remember the street that you walk down or, you know, the painting maybe in the Uffizi, but you may remember the experiences that you have.

[00:09:10.060] - Corinna Cooke
Definitely. Definitely.

[00:09:11.470] - Katy
And so, Corinna, we covered off the highlights of Florence in an earlier episode of the podcast. But I really wanted to talk to you on the show today about those experiences that you can have in the city, because I know that's what you're all about. How can we go about unraveling the essence of Florence Corinna style?

[00:09:29.430] - Corinna Cooke
So what I like to do, I do this for myself and I do this with anyone who's coming on one of my little tours is I start off with let's make a list of 50 things you want to see. And most people off the bat can't come up with 50. So you have to do a little bit of research to start finding things that you might want to add to your list. And we get this nice, big, long list and then we do the killer list, which is what are the experiences I want to have.

[00:09:57.220] - Corinna Cooke
And this is, I think, the most important thing that you do, because I've yet to meet somebody who says I might.. When I dream about Italy, I don't dream about standing in a long line, headphones in my ear, watching somebody waving an umbrella and trying to remember my person's got the orange umbrella today or the blue umbrella today. And waiting for forever to get in to see something. Nobody dreams that. You dream about going to Italy or when you dream about going to Florence, you're probably more thinking in terms of imagining yourself sitting in some piazza with a glass of wine and some cheeses or having a cappuccino and a slice of panforte and watching all the people go by.

[00:10:37.920] - Corinna Cooke
Those are the things that we remember or being somewhere spectacular to watch the sun like come floating down over the top of the Duomo at the end of the day. And it's just beautiful. So I'm all about let's make this big list of experiences focused on those and off your list of things that you want to see with some of those. And that's all very experience driven because that's what you'll remember. Yeah, I could show you ten incredible Palazzi and tell you fantastic stories about them and all the history and everything. And in two years time, you probably won't remember their names, but you will remember what it felt like to sit there and have that glass of wine or to be walking along the river and everything happening. Those are the things that you love. And so I try and really focus on building the experiences.

[00:11:32.070] - Katy

Yeah. So in terms of the experience, I know that one of my favorite places to go and have a glass of wine in Florence is actually in the Piazza Santa Croce, which I think the light there at sunset is just magical. And do you have a favorite place?

[00:11:50.210] - Corinna Cooke

Possibly at the moment, Le Volpi e l'Uva , which is a wine bar just across the river, just across the Ponte Vecchio and Oltrano and what I love about it there is that they have an ever changing variety of wines by the glass, because I'm not really that much of a drinker. So I'm not buying bottles everywhere of glass of wine. But also the people that work there are really into it and they're really into the stories with everything.

[00:12:25.160] - Corinna Cooke

So when when you're saying to them, oh, you know, I'd like to have a white wine, red wine or something local, and you can get them talking and they'll start talking to you about this little boutique winery. And these vines grew on the hill that would get this sun. And so this is very different from the wines that go on that side and they get right into the story with you. And I'm always all about the story. But then you can ask them, what snacks do we have with that? What can we have with this particular wine and they'll choose for you things that go perfectly. And the whole thing becomes a big rounded experience. So I love going doing things that. I also love timing it so that I can be up high somewhere and beautiful view with a glass of wine and watch the whole thing. That always another.

[00:13:21.950] - Katy

Yeah, but you have to be. The timing is very important though, isn't it? Because if you want to go to some of these amazing rooftop bars, unfortunately they do close in October. So you need to be going there, I think between May and October to get onto some of these beautiful rooftop bars,

[00:13:38.780] - Corinna Cooke

maybe go just go up high somewhere and have a drink somewhere else.

[00:13:44.060] - Katy

Oh, that's a good idea.

[00:13:46.120] - Corinna Cooke

I'll often go up to Piazzale Michelangelo just because it's such a spectacular view. I normally, at least once, every time I'm in Florence, will go up there just to just to be there and breathe the air and watch the sunset happening,

[00:14:03.170] - Katy

it's gorgeous and if you walk through that neighborhood, the San Nicollo neighborhood, it's quite a nice place to go for a meal down there as well. But it's a little bit of a trek up that hill unless you take a taxi.

[00:14:15.830] - Corinna Cooke

Oh my gosh, it's such a trek. And I'm so not like one of these fitness chicks that just jogs up those hills.

[00:14:24.800] - Katy

Well, I have to tell you, you might you might enjoy this. I don't know how much of a gelato person you are, Corinna, but I am a big gelato person. And a few visits ago when we were there, they were having the finale of the Gelato Festival of the World Gelato Championships at Piazzale Michelangelo. And yeah, that was pretty good I have to say.

[00:14:50.690] - Corinna Cooke

Oh, my gosh. So one of the things I do on my tours and I always tell people about it is that we have this rule that you only ever eat artisan gelato when you're with me. Never go to any of the chain stores. It's always these artisan made on site places, which is what you would have been having. There's no comparison.

[00:15:14.720] - Katy

No, no. You don't want to eat... As much as these ones where you see them. Everyone, when you go to Italy, where as much as you might like to, and you might be attracted by the mounds of gelato with lots of different multicolored vesions. Don't go there. If you could say the gelato, it's basically a good general rule. If you can see it, don't go there.

[00:15:36.530] - Corinna Cooke

exactly

[00:15:36.530] - Katy

There has to be a lid. The gelato inside a tub, a stainless steel tub with the lid on.

[00:15:44.890] - Corinna Cooke

And then real artisanal gelato, made by hand gelato is not going to have any bright colors at all, and it doesn't fluff. It's nice and flat and the difference in the taste is unbelievable. And then I'm also a huge believer in supporting artisans. And luckily enough, artisan gelato is supporting the craft as well as supporting your taste buds. But there's just no way. And once you've had real artisan gelato, there's no turning back. You can't ever eat the mass produced stuff

[00:16:21.270] - Katy

Did you have a favorite one in Florence?

[00:16:24.070] - Corinna Cooke

Oh, I have a few, actually, I know, and I love over at the Ponte alla Carraia. So down this path from Santo Spirito, they have a fabulous, fabulous gelateria and there's always a line of locals. So it's always good because you can just say to people, is there an artisan gelato shop nearby? And there's always going to be one within a block or two and or I have found you can

even type into your cell phone artisanal gelato near me and there'll be one within a couple of blocks.

[00:16:59.940] - Katy

Yeah, you can't do that. I think I know that Gelateria that you mentioned. Is it Sbrino because I went there about this time last year. I'm still thinking about the salted caramel one I had.

[00:17:11.240] - Corinna Cooke

I go crazy for all the ones that have oddball flavors that we don't get here in the states, like putting lavender or basil or sage or like anything that seems a little odd to be an ice cream or that you don't normally see an ice cream here in gelato there. I'll buy it 100 times over.

[00:17:31.250] - Katy

Hmmm, that sounds delicious,

[00:17:34.930] - Corinna Cooke

And pistachio I'm like, always hopeless with pistachio as well. I just love it so much.

[00:17:39.710] - Katy

That's my husband's favorite. He always gets it. So, you know, like, I always know that he's going to get it. So I don't order because... He's very handy for some things

[00:17:52.460] - Corinna Cooke

I had once. This is completely, completely off the side here. But one time when I was down in Sorrento and I couldn't figure out what flavors I was going to have because they change every day, what they have. So it's not like you going into like Baskin Robbins, 31 flavors that are the same flavors every day. And I was hemming and hawing and I came down to.. So I can't even remember what two they were. And I think we have these these two flavors in a cup. And the guy was like, I will not do that. I will not do that. You cannot make me do that. And he just didn't want me putting the two flavors together.

[00:18:32.660] - Corinna Cooke

So I said, Well, you can give me one and put something that you like with it, and I'll come back tomorrow and have the other one, or we can do two separate cups. And then you know he threw his hands up in the air a little bit up and down, and he was like, I will let you have two separate cups, but don't eat them at the same time. And it was the whole thing was hysterical

[00:18:51.790] - Katy

I do love that passion for it, though, because, you know, they've been testing it out for very many generations. So they know what's going to work on your palate and they know what's going to be good and why not have two gelatos. That's what I say

[00:19:04.110] - Corinna Cooke

That is exactly, exactly the fun of it. But and Florence, of course, is famous for its gelato, so.

[00:19:13.280] - Katy

Absolutely. But it's also famous for its artisans. And you mentioned that. And I think that's one of the things that's carried through from its history. In the end, obviously, this is the place where it's the birthplace of the Renaissance and you've got this tradition of artisans throughout the city and you can find them in many different places, in many different shops. And did you have some favorite kind of places where you go to see these artisan wares?

[00:19:42.290] - Corinna Cooke

Yeah, well, so you have the main streets that have your high street shops on it, but you dig back a block or two and you can find all kinds of boutiques, boutiques for everything under the sun where it tends to be very much artisan work. So in the Oltrano you find tons of them. And I love... One of my favorite things when I have downtime in Florence is I'll just go to Oltrano and just wander. Like turn corners because they're there. And then I stumble across incredible craftspeople and these little shops and they work by their their workbench making fantastic jewelry or shoes. And I found one that has all these little wooden pieces. And it's just.. I love that concept of keeping the art form alive and keeping it going.

[00:20:32.590] - Corinna Cooke

And there's one called Saskia. Saskia makes and made shoes for men. And she has this clientele that... It's all like royals and all these these supersonic people from around the world. And she won't ever let anybody know. Like most people, they put pictures up with all the different celebrities but she'll never let you know who she sells to. But for men who are into bespoke shoes, she makes..It's called a last, which is the shape of their foot. And then it takes six months to make the shoe. And when you go to visit her and you can see her her workroom and she explains it all and shows these fantastic tools that she's been working with for forever. And then the shoes, the displayed shoes, she has them suspended from the walls. It's like they're dancing across the whole thing. You know, I look at things like that and think man it is just so great to have to crafts people still around.

[00:21:36.230] - Katy

Yeah, absolutely. There is amazing jewelry and jewelers in Florence as well. There's one. I don't know if you know this one, Alesandro Dari. It's almost like a museum in there. It's it's blows my mind there. But, yeah, they just do have this tradition of the art and the artisanship. And I just find that longevity of it so fascinating. It really is part of the reason why I love to visit Florence, actually, because they have that tradition so strongly.

[00:22:10.040] - Corinna Cooke

And I'm a big believer in supporting artisans. So I figure, you know, the high street shops, they don't need your business. They've got chains all over the place, but the artisans do. The craftsmen that that make handmade shoes and that make handmade jewelry and then all the embroidery and I mean, whatever it is that you're interested in, there's artisans there making it. So I think it's really important to support them and their business.

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[00:22:35.960] - Katy

Absolutely. And, you know, it's when you go into their shop, it's not just about the wares, which a lot of care and attention goes into, but it's also about how when you enter the shop, how you're greeted. And the whole shopping experience is not like what you have at home. I love that, too. You know, the Bongiorno and..

[00:22:57.140] - Corinna Cooke

And I love that Italians are so gregarious. You can really very easily draw them into conversation. And they love telling you the stories. So I'm always asking about their stories. So how long have you been doing this and how did you get started? And then it all rolls out about the generations of family who've been doing this. And then they they get so excited to tell their story and to show you things and to show you this next part and see this here. My father made this and see this. This was three greats. You know, my great grandfather and and I love all of that.

[00:23:32.120] - Katy

Yeah, absolutely. And I think there's one place Corinna and I have that we both love. And it's probably not surprising given her background as a makeup artist, but it is one place that you can go, which I'll get Corinna to tell you about this because it's one of my favorite places, but it's the Santa Maria Novella Pharmacy and it's got an amazing history.

[00:23:59.150] - Corinna Cooke

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And it started off when the monks came. They were in charge of ... They had these these gardens there at Santa Maria, Novella, and they used those to make all the salves and the medicines that they had. And the pharmacy was where they, that building was where they made them. But they invented, when the plague was there, the antiseptic rose water that you could sprinkle around your house to keep the fleas and things away, which was quite fantastic. They were the first to do it.

[00:24:36.890] - Corinna Cooke

And then when Catherine de Medici was getting married to Francis, who would become.. No, no Henri, Henri de Valois, who became the king of France, the monks made the special fragrance for her and up until that time, fragrances had been suspended in oil. So they would go rancid relatively quickly. And the monks decided to put it and suspend it in alcohol, which is when perfume as we know it now, fragrances are suspended in alcohol. And that was when it all began. So she had this fantastic fragrance and you can still buy that fragrance now. Just kind of exciting.

[00:25:17.870] - Katy

It is. And I have it. I've actually got it the bottle right here with me because I love it. I just love it. I was like I. I have to get that perfume.

[00:25:28.180] - Corinna Cooke

Well, one of the funny things, I got a funny story with that and that I had been to the pharmacy many times, and I'd smelt it, you know, all the rest of it and all the things in there. I loved going there, but it never really resonated with me. And then I had somebody keep saying to me, you have to watch this TV show called Reign. And I think, oh, gosh, it's not my thing. And it's about Mary Queen of Scots. And I really wasn't interested, but she kept bugging me. So in the end, I thought, I'll just watch one episode and then I can say it's not my thing. And of course, I totally and got right into it and was binge watching it. But one of the main characters is Catherine de Medici and like, oh, and she was like ruthless and shrewd. And she was like one of the best characters on this TV show. And so I kept watching the show because she was so interesting.

[00:26:19.720] - Corinna Cooke

But then when I got back to Florence and I went in and I'm like, oh my gosh, this Catherine de Medici's fragrance. And I covered myself in it and I bought everything and I bought the candles, all from this silly TV show. With my tour travelers and when people are talking to me about going there, I'm always like, watch the Medici show and watch this show because when you get like caught up in these characters, it changes how you see things. So that perfume has smelled the same for 500 years. Nothing changed other than I suddenly could identify with how they portrayed Catherine de Medici. But now I can't do any more research on her, because if she's not like they said she was on the show, then I'll lose half the magic.

[00:27:09.340] - Katy

Yeah, there is a bit of dramatization. I haven't seen that one. But the Medici series, those two actually one's a bit more faithful to real life and one's a bit more, takes a bit more poetic license. But I mean. Yeah, who cares. It's all good, you know.

[00:27:26.480] - Corinna Cooke

At the end of the day for most people, if you're not a historian, if you're not an art historian, if you're just a regular person, it doesn't matter if they've taken a little if they've gone a little bit sideways with what actually really happened in history, because it just binds you into the characters. And I find with my tour groups, 100 percent of the time, if they've watched the show on Netflix, they lose their minds. Like everything I show them in Florence they just go berserk because they're identifying Lorenzo and Cosimo. And I can tell a story about Cosimo the Elder, Cosimo de Medici. And they'll hang on to every word because they're attaching it to this character that they saw in the show. Whereas those that haven't watched the show, unless they have a huge interest in the Medici I might as well be talking about Bob Smith half the time, and it really doesn't make that much difference.

[00:28:21.910] - Katy

And it's really worth doing that pre investigation, isn't it? And I think the TV show does make it really accessible. I think if you hadn't studied it at school or you didn't get that that inspiration from where I got it. Yeah, definitely. Go watch the the movies and the TV series because it will get you hooked and you'll learn about the characters of the city because there's so many of them isn't.

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[00:28:45.940] - Corinna Cooke

There is. And then the other thing, too, is when you if you watched lots of movies set in the places that you're going and you've read books that are set there and you've watched these TV shows and things, when you see a lot of these different landmarks, it just resonates differently with you, like, oh my gosh, oh my gosh. Like I take people to the Medici Palace and those who who watched the TV show they go to pieces because that's where so much of it took place.

[00:29:19.240] - Corinna Cooke

And they're running around taking photos and just absolutely losing their minds, like touching the walls and everything. They're so excited. I love doing that and I love leading up to trips. So even when you're researching trips to be taking in every kind of stimulus you can, every kind of piece of research that you can fleshes it all out and you find things that you wouldn't have necessarily known that you would find interesting or find things that that you wouldn't have known that you wanted to see.

[00:29:54.940] - Katy

Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? I think with Florence, you know, everyone is going to see the Duomo, Uffizi Gallery and the Ponte Vecchio, but there's so many different little places that you can go to to get an even richer perspective of the city. And one of the places I like to go, and I think I know you do too, because I've read your book, is the Palazzo Vecchio and I just love it. I just love it. I think it's one of those places that, sadly, people don't go and you need to go there to understand how powerful this family was and just how wealthy they were and how influential they were on the city.

[00:30:35.030] - Corinna Cooke

Yeah, it's quite hard to wrap your head around quite what they achieved because they came from, not from nothing, but from nothing much. And they at a time when it was noble families that ruled everything and these upstarts came in and they created all this wealth. But they also had unbelievable political shrewdness and cunning and they were able to see a really big picture and forecast out a really long game. So they they built this extraordinary wealth. But at the same time, they had this unbelievable love of art. And so they were the most influential family probably in all of history when it comes to art and liberating artists and lifting them paint things that weren't inside the church.

[00:31:27.560] - Katy

Exactly. That's such a great point, because up until that time, you know, everything was done for the church, wasn't it? And so you have this huge religious influence on everything. And then they started to have more patronage

[00:31:46.540] - Corinna Cooke

They were letting artists create beauty and then also had this great ideal, that beauty should be for everybody. So it wasn't that everything was locked behind closed doors. They made

Florence this really beautiful city. They changed the architecture of Florence. A lot of that comes down to the stature of the family and their influence and the things that they did. And so everywhere you turn, it's them. And I find that fascinating. But the Palazzo Vecchio, one of my favorite things to do, and I'm so lucky because I get to go to these places I love and doing things. And I'll do it over and over and over and over again because it's so fun. They have this tour that you can go on at the Palazzo Vecchio called the Secret Passages Tour. And I don't think too many people know about it because I can just walk in with a group and get straight on it. But it takes you literally inside the walls of the palace. And the various Medici created these different rooms to store their private art and to store their treasures.

[00:32:53.200] - Corinna Cooke

And some of them got into sciences and alchemy and they would do the experiments and things there. And then they could like look out and watch what the politicians were doing down on the floor. And they could... It was just fantastic. And you could walk all the way through there and with a guide there explaining what you're seeing and showing you these fantastic things.

[00:33:13.710] - Corinna Cooke

And then if anybody's seen the movie Inferno, with Robert Langdon and with the other characters, but a lot of it happens or a portion of it happens inside the Palazzo Vecchio and they actually go up into the rafters above the salon of five hundred ceiling. And there's this chase scene that happens up there. But on this tour, they take you up there. And so you get to see it. They don't take you out because of the movie that came out. But you get to see how clever it was that they had this one hoist system that lifts up the ceiling. But it is so heavy. Another one that holds the roof down and all these that's treated wood that's been there for five hundred years. And it's all there working and doing. And it's fantastic being up there, seeing it. It's amazing. It empties you out into the Medici apartments because they lived there for a time when they were running Florence. And so you get to walk through and see where they lived and how they lived and walk out on their balconies and see what they saw. It's wonderful.

[00:34:25.110] - Katy

They had some pretty good views. Of course.

[00:34:29.220] - Corinna Cooke

It depends on the weather. You can actually go up the tower as well. Which I always think in Florence, if you're going to go up high, maybe don't go up the Duomo, because the great thing to see when you're up high is to look out at the Duomo. So I will go up the tower instead at Palazzo Vecchio and you get up there and there's the cells where Cosimo de Medici was kept prisoner. And Ronaldo degli Albizzi and Savonarola, they were the prison cells that were kept up in this tower. But you can walk out and now you've got this view right out across Florence. And you can look kind of right at the Duomo from up high. It's fantastic.

[00:35:14.790] - Katy

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Yeah, it's a hot tip, everyone. And it's much easier to get into, isn't it, than the Duomo?

[00:35:21.450] - Corinna Cooke

Much easier. You get vastly fewer people and it's got half the stairs. So it's like win, win, win. But another cool thing for your listeners is if you do go to the tower and you get to walk out on the outside part of the tower, you see, look on the ground and you see glass bricks. And when you get to the first set of glass bricks, stand over them and look down and you actually look down on the head of David.

[00:35:47.280] - Corinna Cooke

So they had the replica, David, that's outside the Plaza Vecchio, which is where the original David actually originally was. But he got put carefully away at the Accademia. You can stand up there and look down on David's head and it's just the the craziest sensation. And you have a whole different. Well, obviously a different perspective visually, but you have a different perspective on the creation of him as well.

[00:36:14.150] - Katy

Yeah, wow, I did not know that. I'm going to look for the glass brick now. I'll be off there for sure. Yeah, the Medici is there, it's impossible to overestimate the importance that they have in the city. Did you have a favorite Medici?

[00:36:34.640] - Corinna Cooke

Well, I've kind of got a few I love, and the Medici they get really confusing because they kept recycling the same name. But the original Cosimo, who they now refer to as Cosimo the Elder, he was so brilliant and such a fascinating character. And without him, none of it would have happened. So I'm really fascinated with him. And then, of course, Lorenzo the Magnificent because of all the art that he's responsible for.

[00:37:08.600] - Corinna Cooke

But then another one of my favorites is Fernando. So when they ran out of the original Cosimo line, the last one, which is all kinds of interesting stories in there, they desperately needed a new Medici. And so they went to his brother Lorenzo down his line and there was a young Cosimo. So he was brought over. And had they made him run things from when he was 17 years old and he's a fascinating character too. But he had all these children. Ans the first couple died, and then there was Francesco who got to take over from them, the first the Francesco, and then there was the brother, Fernando. Now, Fernando was fascinating. He's so interesting, apart from the fact that he murdered Francesco who just kind of needed to go anyway. But this is whole story and he's a bad guy, but he's a good guy and and he's a bit of a despot, but he rules really well. And everybody loves him and he's just this intriguing character.

[00:38:13.310] - Corinna Cooke

And there's a big statue of him in one of my favorite piazzas, which is another one that your listeners need to know about. But Fernando is there on his horse welcoming you into this

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piazza. He's just fantastic. And if you if you read up on him a little bit and find out about him, suddenly seeing the statue is like, oh, my God, he's fantastic. You get really excited.

[00:38:35.750] - Corinna Cooke

So where the Duomo is... Piazza del Duomo when you're there, it's so full of people with all the tour buses and all the cruise ships, everybody is there. And there's always this big, long line of people waiting to get inside the Duomo. But if you walk along to the back end of Duomo.. . where the actual dome is, keep walking back from back there. Just follow the line of people and then you see this little narrow street and it's only 500 metres long. It's like two blocks long. And you walk along that and it takes you to the Piazza della Santissima Annunziata, which is a fantastic renaissance piazza. And there'll be a billion people five hundred meters behind you inside the at the Duomo and there will be next to nobody at this beautiful piazza. And it has so much I mean, it has Fernando welcoming you there on his horse, although it's not actually welcoming. I think he's a bit masterful. There's all kinds of fantastic stories that happen inside this piazza.

[00:39:41.450] - Corinna Cooke

In the piazza there is an incredible church, which is well worth going to have a look in. There is incredible artwork. There's Brunelleschi's first architecture job was creating the front of the Hospital of the Innocents. It's an orphanage, which is on one side. And then a couple of hundred years later, they matched all the other sides to make it look like that. There's a ghost story in there. There's just so much .The museum that is, I think, fantastic. And you can go and see Botticelli and Ghilardaro and everybody and there's nobody there. And this has just been refurbished. So the lighting and the spacing and everything is beautiful. And then you can go up there and have a coffee up in their cafe and you're looking right at the Duomo and there's nobody around. So it's fantastic.

[00:40:36.380] - Katy

Yeah, it's just stunning and it's really worth building in time, even if you haven't been to Florence before. And of course, you want to go and see the main Duomo in the main, Uffizi. All of those things that are so famous for a reason. But you just want to have these little adventures on the side, right, because you won't ever regret it, I think.

[00:40:59.410] - Corinna Cooke

And the thing is, is that Florence is actually really, really small. And if you use, say, the Duomo as your centrepiece really going, the furthest you're going to go is 20 minutes walk from there. There's just so much to see inside of there. So if you're ducking down the streets and going to wonder what's down here, you're going to find something amazing and you'll find the tourists are gone, too, because they will stay in these main areas.

[00:41:28.120] - Katy

Yeah, it's true. And they sort of congregate at, most people kind of congregate between the Uffizi and the Duomo and the Ponte Vecchio. And as Corinna has already mentioned, quite a few places that are literally meters, just steps from those places where you can feel like

you're in a whole other world, like they're very small and more neighborhoodly and you're going to get a totally different vibe of the city. Because I have to say, I went September a few years ago and it was very busy. And I can see how people could be frustrated and a little bit disappointed if they just stuck to the main areas. But if you go, you take a little detour, you'll be much better off.

[00:42:13.840] - Corinna Cooke

Well, I think the Duomo is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, so I find ways to go past that a million times a day. I love it, but I seldom go inside of it. Because inside.. I think that Florence has so many devastatingly spectacular churches. If you're going to go inside one, you've got to go inside a couple those others to go see.. That's what I think and I don't believe in standing in line for virtually anything. For most people, when you go to go to Florence, when you go on your trip to Italy, it's something that you saved up a really long time for.

[00:42:54.000] - Corinna Cooke

And you've got this this box of time. You've got a couple of weeks or however long you're there. So if you're in Florence, you've got a day, a couple of days, three days or whatever. There's there's just so much to see. There's no reason to stop blowing out your time by standing in long lines to get into overcrowded things. So I always recommend people go if you want to see inside a church, perhaps go inside the Basilica Santa Croce, which I think is just spectacular. Santissima Annunziata is incredible. And that's just right there, right beside the the Duomo. It'll take you all of maybe four minutes to walk to it. But you're in a whole different world.

[00:43:40.530] - Katy

You get a gelato, it'll be fine.

[00:43:43.040] - Corinna Cooke

Oh, yeah. That's only two minutes. You can go in and see all this incredible stuff and have a gelato and your friends are still in line and you'd be like, what are they doing? But there's really there's so many incredible churches. And I always try and encourage people to even if you're not, you may not think that you're interested in churches or church art, but it's well worthwhile going inside and seeing some because this is a fantastic way to trace the history of Florence and to understand the people of Florence, because the art is... I mean, the frescoes are unbelievable.

[00:44:19.810] - Corinna Cooke

But apart from that, they painted everything in the wardrobe of the day. So whenever it was they were painting this fresco, they are using the colors of clothing that were worn then and the hairstyles that were worn then and the clothing styles that a woman wore. So even if it's a religious scene, they're not actually painting it in Jesus's time. They're painting it in the trend of the day when they were making it. And so you can really get a fascinating look at

the people of Florence and what was going on and what it must have looked like to walk through these streets.

[00:44:56.280] - Corinna Cooke

And 1377 or 1427 or 1555. You see how these different habits, how the clothes change. The perception of beauty. They, normally put in the faces of the patrons that you know, who say whoever owns this chapel inside the church and was paying for the artwork, they're going to be in there and some of their friends will be in there. And the artists have painted themselves and their friends into the story as well. And so when you know this and different things to look for, it's fascinating.

[00:45:29.790] - Katy

Absolutely. And I think, you know, Corinna and I have a very strong affinity with the Medici, but there's also so many geniuses that came from Florence and you mentioned Santa Croce. And that's a great place to go because a lot of them are actually interred there. And it's kind of like the genius mausoleum, isn't it?

[00:45:48.720] - Corinna Cooke

But I'm always amazed at how does this one place that's not even that big. And if you stand on the hill and you look at Florence, you see it's not a big city by any means. How do you think this creates so many absolute geniuses, like brilliant artists, brilliant musicians, brilliant scientist? I mean, Galileo was there. It's the best of everything. I wonder about what was in the water back then.

[00:46:14.070] - Katy

I don't know. Corinna, you've spent a lot of time in Florence and you've seen all these sites. But I really want to know.. Just imagine you had one spare day just to do anything you wanted in Florence. What would you do? How would you spend a day in Florence?

[00:46:29.730] - Corinna Cooke

Well, I always like getting up early when I'm in Florence. Not every day, but at least one day I'll get up and I'll go hit the streets at like seven thirty in the morning because there's nobody there yet. And I love to go and do a nice walk through the Piazza del Duomo. I'll go up and walk up to the Piazza della Signoria and see all the incredible statues and everything that are in there in the loggia. And I'll walk through where the Uffizi is and there's more statues the whole way through there and out and across across the Ponte Vecchio and getting to do it before the tour buses come.

[00:47:08.700] - Corinna Cooke

You have a whole different perspective and all those statues are there for you and you alone because nobody else .. There will maybe be a handful of people. But but you can really see them and walk around them and experience them and look at everything and really see how magnificent and beautiful this city is before it gets flooded with people. So I'll do that. I normally once I cross the Ponte Vecchio, crossing the Ponte Vecchio before all the shops open

is wonderful, too, because they have all the old shutter style doors with the gold padlocks and everything, so you don't get to experience that once they're open and then by night time is still like this, too many people around. So I love seeing all of that.

[00:47:51.680] - Corinna Cooke

And then I like to go across into the Oltrano, which is an incredible, incredible neighborhood to wander around. It is that whole other side of the Arno. And I'll always stop and have a cappuccino and a slice of panforte. That's what I like to have for breakfast when I'm in Florence. And you walk so much that the calories don't count anyway.

[00:48:13.250] - Katy

Course not calories are like approximately half I'd say,

[00:48:18.410] - Corinna Cooke

but you can, you can eat all the stuff and you come home and haven't gained an ounce because you've done all this walking

[00:48:24.980] - Katy

And it's very good food too. It's like your body's just going, oh this is nice, I like it.

[00:48:32.300] - Corinna Cooke

And so yeah I love it, I love eating panforte. It's just the best thing ever. And for those of you that don't know, panforte is this kind of spicy cake that's got only enough flour to hold it together. And it got dried fruits and nuts and things and lots of spices and ginger and honey and then just enough flour to hold it together. And they actually used to make it for the nuns. It's from Siena and of the Siena area. But now it's ... You find it everywhere. And I always have it when I'm in Florence.

[00:49:06.980] - Corinna Cooke

But I would also go and walk through at least a couple of churches. And once once you've seen inside some of them and see how spectacular they are, it becomes quite interesting going through and walking and having a look, and most of them have next to nobody in them. So one of my favorites is Ognisanti, which is over by the Santa Maria Novella area. And it's staggering. It really takes your breath away and there'll be almost nobody there. And in fact, last summer I'd been there and I walked out into the cloisters and the back and I always wake my mom up because she's like 12 hours difference in New Zealand. And I was like, oh, my gosh, you won't even believe this. And there is nobody here. And she loves art. So she gets that. She thinks it's worthwhile waking up for.

[00:50:02.690] - Corinna Cooke

So last summer I come out and I was in the Cloisters. I couldn't believe that here I was seeing all these unbelievable frescoes. And there they date back to the thirteen hundreds and there is like basically nobody there. And then I looked over and I saw this woman standing there with her cell phone and she was crying. And I thought, oh no, maybe she's lost or something.

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You know, maybe something's gone wrong. So I went over to help her and she was crying because she couldn't believe that she was going to see this. There's only the two of us out there. And Florence was bursting like bursting at the seams, which was at the time. Yeah, there's lots and lots of places like that we can go. And you have this unbelievable experience and you see all these incredible things. And there's nobody much else there looking at them because they're all standing in the Piazza del Duomo waiting in line to get into the Accademia.

[00:50:54.740] - Katy

Yeah, yeah. It's definitely worth going for a wander around and explore, much like in a room with a view. I don't know if you've read that book. I'm pretty sure you have.. Or seen the movie. But yeah, she goes off without her Baedeker, which is a guide book and she goes exploring. And I think it's one of those things that gets my pulse racing every time I see that movie.

[00:51:16.370] - Corinna Cooke

Absolutely. And I love wandering. So I love wandering in the Oltrano and I love wandering in that whole area around Santa Maria Novella. So not not the train station part of it, but between the church and the river, there's just all these little side streets and they have fantastic little eateries and interesting shops to look at and very few tourists. So you really can you can walk down these streets and get a feeling of being in Florence rather than the tourist experience, even in summer, even even even when it's just been packed to bursting.

[00:51:58.250] - Corinna Cooke

You know, when I have my tour groups there. We just like divert and I take them and they don't know that I'm like taking them away from the tourists. They're just like, oh, my gosh, look at this. It's amazing. And looking at all these beautiful streets and the tabernacles, you know, the little artworks that are built into the buildings and then the wine windows, seeing those and all these fantastic things that you miss, if you just stick to the main sights.

[00:52:25.400] - Katy

So if you haven't heard about the wine windows, maybe Corinna you can tell people a bit about the wine windows, because this is actually one of my favorite things about Florence. I think it's highly civilized, highly

[00:52:36.140] - Corinna Cooke

It's brilliant. So basically, they decided that they would allow people to sell wine from their palazzo. So if you were... If you had a vineyard out in Tuscany, you know, you didn't really have somewhere to sell your wine. So they made these little wine windows on the side of a palazzo and you'd have your servants in there and some could come up and knock on this little wooden window and they would open it and then they'd buy a bottle or they buy a glass. And so they didn't have to actually come inside your palazzo. They were staying out in the street. But the servant would run down, grab the wine and put it back out through the little window. And it's such a cool, quirky, fascinating thing. A lot of them have been closed up because

those Palazzi have now become hotels or whatever. But there are some that are still functioning.

[00:53:31.050] - Katy

I know so much fun.

[00:53:35.420] - Corinna Cooke

I mean, I just think it's just a fantastic, quirky thing to know about. And I think there's one hundred and fifty of them total in Florence. And so once you train your eye to start looking for it, you suddenly spot them and be like, oh my gosh, look at this. And then again, you see like just a line of people walking right past have no clue. And then you get to see this special thing, enjoy it, which I would love that.

[00:54:01.730] - Katy

Yeah, it's very special. It's one of those unique things. There's so many little nooks and crannies and stories to uncover. You can literally spend a lot of time exploring Florence. I think it's one of those places. And trust me, I know some people have been disappointed when they go. And they... It's mainly because they're trying to just hit the highlights of what's expected, not the highlights, what's going to be a highlight for them. And so I know Corinna feels very strongly about that.

[00:54:29.450] - Corinna Cooke

Yeah, I think that most guidebooks just send you to the places that the tour buses will go. So and people don't necessarily know to walk down some of these different streets where there's all these other things. You think, well, what do you see in Florence? It's this handful of things. And if that's all you're going to see, then you can have... I think it's slightly disappointing or overwhelming experience because it's all with the crowds. But if you can do a little research and you'll find that everything is really right there, it's it's incredible.

[00:55:05.210] - Corinna Cooke

Like another one that always strikes me as being so fascinating is Orsan Michele, which is a church that you wouldn't know. It's a church because it's square. It used to be granery and it's on that main drag when you're walking down to the Ponte Vecchio. So there'll be just a steady stream of walking tours going past and, you know, just hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people and nobody goes inside. And it is just amazing. And it has a story behind it and all these quirky, funny things to look for and seek out. And it gets quite exciting when you see all of those things and you're right in the heart of everything. So you don't actually have to get off the beaten track to be off the beaten track in Florence.

[00:55:57.770] - Katy

Absolutely. Now, everyone, if you want to uncover some more of these places like Corinna has shared with you, the best thing to do is get Corinna's book on Florence. But I'll also ask her to share with you how you can stay in touch with her, because as you can see, she's got so much knowledge and so much passion for Florence and Italy.

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[00:56:19.040] - Corinna Cooke

Oh, yes, I absolutely love it, so I have a website which is corinnacooke.com, and I also I have a link to my blog on the website, but I've been blogging at corinnabsworld.com for years and years and years and years, and it's pretty much all just about travelling in Italy. And I have tons of things on Florence and interesting bits and pieces to do. And then actually on Pinterest, unfortunately, I got my Pinterest board and everything going years ago when it was everything was about makeup so it's called CorinnaMakeup is my Pinterest tag, which should be something fabulous, like Glam Italia or something. But my Pinterest boards now are all just Italy. But you can go, for example, to Tuscany in Tuscany board and it just has endless things to do in Tuscany and in Florence and every every pin. If you click on it, it'll take you into the corresponding blog post. So it makes it really easy to be able to see a picture of something and then go in and do that thing rather than trying to do all this Googling.

[00:57:24.710] - Katy

I'm actually a big fan of Pinterest, but travel, I haven't actually met anyone else who is, but it's a good tip. I do like Pinterest for researching travel. It's an excellent tip. Thanks, Corinna.

[00:57:36.030] - Corinna Cooke

It's actually one of the greatest tools for researching travel. And you can plot out the places that you're going and then go on Pinterest and type, for example, interesting things to do and find, unusual things to do in Florence. And you're going to come up with all these things, mostly travel bloggers, who I think have a very interesting perspective. And you'll get some things that are telling you to go to all the things you've always heard of, but you can find absolutely amazing things to see and do that you'd never heard of before or type in gelato and Florence. And there'll be all these people popping up with the 10 best places that have artisan gelato in Florence. There's just so much information there. And then you can build boards where, you know, when you're on Pinterest finding all these things, you can save them to your Florence board. And so then when you're there or when you're in that last part of your trip, you've got all this great information condensed into this one place. And it's got pictures to remind you, because, you know, when you just see a bunch of words about something that you can't quite remember what it was but it was interesting to you six months ago, it's not quite the same as seeing a picture of that thing and 10 reasons why you need to go here, you know, really drilled it down for you.

[00:58:58.410] - Katy

Absolutely. Wonderful tip. Okay, listeners, if you like fun and fresh approach to Italian history and art and of course, eating, drinking and shopping, then really I very much encourage you to seek out Corinna's glam guides. They are full of the amazing insights she shared with us today. And as I mentioned earlier in the show, they were really big inspiration for this podcast. So it's absolutely a thrill to have Corinna on the show. And I'm sure that if you have the opportunity to join one of her tours, you'll be talking fondly about it for years to come. Corinna it's been an absolute pleasure talking to you on Untold Italy today.

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[00:59:36.110] - Corinna Cooke

Wonderful. Thank you so much for having me. I've loved it.

[00:59:39.890] - Katy

So who wants to hunt down those wine windows and spritz perfume made for a queen with Corinna? I know I do. What fun. And that's exactly what travel should be all about, don't you think? Uncovering those things that bring you joy and put a smile on your face when you think of them many, many years after. Corinna's books regularly hit the bestseller lists and you'll find them on Amazon and all major bookstores, I put all her details and links to her books into the show notes at untolditaly.com/49 for episode forty nine.

[01:00:11.660] - Katy

Now Corinna has eleven books planned in total. Eleven! So exciting. So no doubt you'll be hearing her voice on the podcast again very soon. I certainly hope so. Now if you enjoyed this episode we'd love it if you gave it a rating or review in your favourite podcast app. It really does bring a smile to our faces to know that you enjoy the show. That's all for this week. Next week it's our fiftieth episode and I couldn't be more excited. Stay tuned for some more exciting glimpses of Italy and a giveaway, but more on that next time. Ciao for now.