

Untold Italy Episode 46 - Puglia

[00:01:00.350] - Katy

Buongiorno, ciao everyone Katy here, and I hope you are all well and bringing a little piece of Italy into your life every day. I just realized this morning that it was a year ago that I was having lunch with a friend in Orvieto. We had stopped off there on our way to Florence from Rome and it was such a fun day. And even though I was jet lagged in a way that you can only be when you travel 24 hours by plane from Australia, I remember being very excited and happy to be walking around this beautiful town and enjoying my truffle pasta and first gelato in Italy for quite some time.

[00:01:35.930] - Katy

Wow. A lot has changed since then, hasn't it? But one thing that hasn't changed at all is how much I value my friends and the amazing times I have had in Italy. Earlier this week, I announced our new private membership group, Untold Italy Insiders that we created, especially for people like you who want to keep their dreams of Italy flourishing while we wait out this season. In Insiders, you'll meet my friends from Italy and around the world and start building on your knowledge of Italian culture, food and wine. So when you finally get there and you will, you have a better understanding of what is happening around you and you can soak it all up just like a piece of bread in pasta sauce.

[00:02:18.380] - Katy

As soon as you sign up, you get instant access to our private Facebook community, Untold Italy insiders and our membership site, where you'll find a 20 page guide to Rome full of all my secret addresses and laid out in easy to follow format. So planning is a cinch. There's an Italian Wine 101 cheat sheet and Chianti briefing, which includes secret addresses of wineries you will want to visit hand selected by Giovanni, our wine expert. There's also a recipe and cooking video for my favorite dish, melanzane parmigiana. That's eggplant parmigiana and it's brought to you by Holly and Gianluca in beautiful Capri. Plus, there's a wonderful presentation on the highlights of Pompeii by Danielle, our art historian.

[00:03:05.930] - Katy

Now, as it is the first week of our venture, we have also released some special bonuses for our founding members who sign up this week. And that's our sample five day itinerary for Rome printable, which has all the details of how you can make the most of your time in Rome. And it's an itinerary that can be customized easily for fewer or more days. And it goes hand in hand with a guide I created for the group. Plus, there's a one page Rome planner with a link to a Google map that will save you buckets of time trying to organize your time in Rome. So don't miss out. Come and join us at untolditaly.com/insiders. We can't wait to see you there. And of course, there's a link to this in the show notes.

[00:03:46.460] - Katy

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OK, now onto today's episode, which is such a thrill for me. We are talking about the southern area of Puglia with cookbook author, photographer and tour guide Paola Bacchia from Italy. On my mind, I've been following Paola for years, thanks to her dreamy photography that perfectly captures the Italian light and mouthwatering recipes that are straightforward to prepare.

[00:04:12.200] - Katy

Paola was born in Australia, in Melbourne, just as I am to Italian parents and travels to Italy every year. Except this one, of course, to reconnect with her family and friends, run food tours and research her next cookbook. I've asked her along on the show today to talk to us about Puglia, where she spent a lot of time researching her book *Adriatico* and where she'll be hosting a tour in 2021. So let's welcome her onto the show.

[00:04:40.680] - Katy

Ciao Paola! Benvenuta. Welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

[00:04:44.240] - Paola Bacchia

Hi Katy. Thank you so much for inviting me to be on this, I'm really excited to be on with you today, chatting, rather than being in lockdown.

[00:04:53.900] - Katy

I cannot tell you how thrilled I am to have you join us today. I have followed your beautiful blog and it's mouthwatering recipes for years. And your most recent cookbook, *Adriatico*, was a huge inspiration for adding Puglia to our sadly canceled trip this year. So you inspired me, but I'm wondering what inspired you to visit and now continue exploring Puglia.

[00:05:15.800] - Paola Bacchia

Well, Puglia. So my family... I'll talk just a little bit about my background and why Puglia fits into that. So my family is from the Adriatic coast of Italy, like right up the top - hence the book of *Adriatico*. So Dad is from what is now Croatia. But it was Italy at the time, the Istrian peninsula. And mum is from Veneto.

[00:05:37.820] - Paola Bacchia

And so, you know, the times I've been to Italy has always been on the Adriatic coast.. Particularly when I was younger and when we lived there, I did a couple of years of school there, too, and our family moved over. We were around that area around Trieste, Monfalcone, Gorizia. And there are a lot of Pugliese that live up there. In fact, after World War Two, because it was a very contested zone, there's quite a large civilian population, so they wanted to make it a bit more Italian. So they moved up a whole lot of Pugliese, which is really quite interesting. Hence, I knew quite a few. My mum did too. Her best friend was from Bari, and one of my cousins is married a Pugliese in Monfalcone. So I have sort of known about Pugliese and known about their food and I guess their generosity, the types of people they are from these connections around Trieste.

[00:06:37.350] - Paola Bacchia

But, I didn't go there because I'd go to Trieste then probably when I started my blog and then started looking at writing cookbooks, I thought I've got to explore a bit more of Italy than just, you know, Rome and Florence and the part of Venice and the part of Italy that I knew. Which was really and Veneto.

[00:06:59.850] - Paola Bacchia

So when I was researching Italian street food, I went on a three week trip in 2015 to do the research. Street food really took me down to Puglia. And so I was so excited to actually go down there. And once I was there, I've since been back five or six times. I fell in love initially with the food, but also the whole connection with the people. It felt very familiar, but different. And it's also along the Adriatic coast.

[00:07:28.380] - Paola Bacchia

I just feel this absolute connection with all the places around the Adriatic is a connector of people, even over the other side of the Adriatic into the Balkans and over to Greece. It's like, it's just a little subculture thing. So completely drawn to Puglia. And then it was the look of it. Have you been to Puglia Katy?

[00:07:50.970] - Katy

I haven't yet, no. That was a plan for March.

[00:07:53.790] - Paola Bacchia

Ahh That was the plan for March. So, you know, the appearance of it. It's a really long, narrow region that spans the heel of the boot of Italy. And right up to that spur, you know how there's a little spur out of the back of the boot, the peninsula that sticks into the into the Adriatic. So it's got a massive coastline. And from the part that's around the heel, it's really quite different in appearance to the northern part.

[00:08:21.990] - Paola Bacchia

So in the southern part, it's flat. The land is really red colored and there are olive trees that are thousands of years old that dot this beautiful red landscape. So when you fly in, you see these fields of massive olive trees. It's a really quite a rural flat area. It's got an incredible feel. I just fell in love with the look of it. It looks so almost not Italian or not Italian, the way I know Italy, which is more the north of Italy.

[00:08:59.520] - Paola Bacchia

And then there's the northern part that I went to research my second book at Adriatico. So that was a three month journey along the whole coastline of Italy that we drove along, which was an amazing experience. And we spent a week in the Gargano, which is that the area that sits out of the boot and that is covered by these ancient forests. It's one of the it's the oldest forests in Italy. It contains the oldest trees and it's on this big plateau.

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[00:09:30.330] - Paola Bacchia

And the coast drops down onto the water, to these beautiful beaches in the towns of Peschici and Vieste and Rodi. And it's just stunning. And then again, the food and the generosity of the people.

[00:09:46.860] - Katy

Wow, it is something that I was completely drawn to as well. And as you mentioned, the sea, the call of the sea that beautiful like azure blue waters. And also there's those little fishing piers that they have there..

[00:10:02.610] - Paola Bacchia

Ahh that's a bit further north. So that's that's the very top of the Gargano Peninsula. There's a couple of them, they're called trabbochi. And then there's a whole lot as you go out of Puglia in past Molise and up to Abruzzo. That's what you're talking about, isn't it, those fishing piers?

[00:10:20.890] - Katy

Yes, it's beautiful. You're right. I think the landscape is very unique compared to other parts of Italy. And that's really what is intriguing and interesting about Italy as well. As you had these pictures in your mind, but then you don't have to go very far to find other unique landscapes.

[00:10:38.910] - Paola Bacchia

No, I mean, the whole of Italy, you've got a big mountain range right down the middle of it. And it's it's like this peninsula that juts out into the into the Mediterranean. So you've got so many beaches and this mountain range right in the middle that stops short of Puglia, though, but it's particularly the southern part. Salento or the tip of the boot, heel of the boot. So it is really diverse and you've got everything there. You've got mountains, you've got beaches. You've got you know, you've got the culture. You've got the people. I love it. I love Puglia. I think after Friuli-Venezia Giulia because I'm from there and Veneto, it's close to my heart because of the very familiarity of it. But Puglia is definitely right up there.

[00:11:29.590] - Katy

Wow. Amazing. So there's so many things that I wanted to do and see. But if you were a first time visitor, where would you start?

[00:11:36.220] - Paola Bacchia

OK, so I mean, there is as I said before, there are two distinct areas of it. The Gargano, which is the spur of the boot and then the heel and the heel is the part that most people go to because you land in through the two major airports there, which is Bari or Brindisi. Brindisi is further south.

[00:11:59.710] - Paola Bacchia

So the things to do, the towns to go to, I think Bari is unmissable. It is right on the water, as are many, many towns in Puglia, and it's got an old town which is pretty much untouched through

these town walls called Bari Vecchia, which means old Bari. So it's got.. There's not many cars in old Bari because the streets are too narrow and there's all the original buildings. They haven't knocked them down and put in a new condominium or a supermarket within the walls of the old town. So it has this incredible feel. If you walk around and you can smell.. In Puglia, they've got the front door of the house opens directly onto the road, like with no yard. And they keep their doors open all the time because because it's warm down there, the weather's really good. So they keep it open and you can smell people cooking like the meal around lunchtime.

[00:13:02.140] - Paola Bacchia

You can smell the food. Some of them even cook outside. They put a little barbecue thing and cook the fish in the street so that the house won't smell of fish. So Bari. And in Bari, of course, you have to go to the street where you see the ladies rolling the . And they're ladies who sit outside their home and they roll the orecchiette and they roll them so quickly. And I put a video on my Instagram and it was a lady. She's talking on the phone. She's holding her mobile phone. Like between her ear. I'm actually showing you the gesture. You can't see me because I'm not on video but I'm putting my head down to my shoulder and holding up the sign and talking really loud and just rolling. These orecchiette for like half an hour. It was hilarious because she was so fast. So Bari is an absolute unmissable place. Another place is, if you like ceramics, to go to a town called Grottaglie, which is more towards the Ionian coast. So it's it's within that hill. And Grottaglie is known for those ceramics, you know, that speckle pattern.

[00:14:10.990] - Paola Bacchia

Have you seen that speckled pattern on plates where it looks like they just throw, they throw spots everywhere. So it's a ceramics town and they've got like shops that are open. And the buses of people drop in and go to visit the workshops which are open, and they will show you they're throwing the pottery on the wheel and shaping it. And then they're painting it. And that is absolutely beautiful.

[00:14:38.350] - Paola Bacchia

Then you should go to to an olive oil press. So Puglia is known for its high quality olive oil. Now, up until about one hundred years ago, these olive oil presses were all underground. So Puglia, particularly the south being a poor region or more rural region, there's not very much industry there even now. So it looks very flat. And the olive oil was pressed underground. And that's because underground you can maintain a temperature of above six degrees, which is the temperature at which olive oil goes freezes or goes solid.

[00:15:19.690] - Paola Bacchia

And these presses, you see these amazing stone things underground that used to be pulled by horses like two thousand years ago. And they're still there, like so much of Puglia under these Masserie. If you know where you're going, it's like a museum that is not controlled by a museum. It's run by private people. And you can just go in there and walk on these stones from two thousand years ago and see these stone presses where the horses would sleep underground. They

go through this massive hole and stay there for a long period of time. And the donkeys and the men would stay down there, too, because they worked under there to make the olive oil.

[00:15:59.040] - Paola Bacchia

And the other thing, there's so many things to see in Puglia, another thing, is there are religious processions. So they decorate their town, the towns with things called luminarie, which are like wooden structures that are quite intricate and they have small lights on them and they lock them up at night, at night time.

[00:16:21.450] - Paola Bacchia

I don't know if you've seen photos to make these beautiful patterns and they're often, they line the road and form archways over the road and they will put them up for often for religious festival like around Easter and the Annunciation. They're really quite religious towns. So if you happen to turn up in a town that has a procession (and there's website where you can find out when they are) all of town get dressed up and they follow the wooden Madonna on a platform being carried through the town under the archway, if it's during the daytime, the lights aren't lit. But then at night time they're all lit and everyone has a really big party. So a religious festival is an incredible way to experience the real off the beaten track Puglia.

[00:17:08.690] - Katy

I think that is an absolutely amazing. And we saw something similar in Sicily and I'm not really religious myself, but it was really very moving because everyone is so, you know, involved. The whole community is involved and everyone's getting dressed up and they have these special foods that go with it, it's just it's very amazing cultural experience, actually.

[00:17:33.370] - Paola Bacchia

Yeah, it is. And the whole town gets involved and gets behind the priests and they're all dressed up. There was one procession that I saw in the town of Maglie, which they have on Good Friday, or maybe it's Holy Thursday. And the band, there's also a band playing, and they get dressed up in dinner suits and they do this long like trek of the town, like many kilometers and stopping in at different churches and holding Madonna dressed in black.

[00:18:04.290] - Katy

Oh, fascinating. It's so far removed from our life here in Melbourne, isn't it.

[00:18:10.440] - Paola Bacchia

Yeah it is. But it really shows the spirit of the community which I love about the whole of Italy. You find villages that have a real community spirit, but I think the people in the South are very warm hearted and open and wanting to share their traditions. I think it's an amazing experience.

[00:18:34.590] - Katy

I think I would be.. I'm such a nosy person that I would actually love the fact that the doors are open. It's OK to have a little nosy inside and look at what they're cooking.

[00:18:43.050] - Paola Bacchia

Yeah, but you can you stop and ask them. I mean you need to speak Italian, but you know. "What are you making for lunch? Tell me about it and they'll give you a recipe. In fact, I'll tell you something about my research for my cookbooks. This is what I do - I stop and I ask people. Like I go to market and I say, well, what would you make with it? Tell me, how would you do it? They might not give me the complete recipe. But I work it out. So that's what you do in Puglia, too, when you smell something good. Say, my god, what are you making? How did you make it? And they're very excited to tell you.

[00:19:17.110] - Katy

Oh, my goodness. Well, I saw one thing from your blog which made me so hungry, which is this octopus sandwich ..

[00:19:24.420] - Paola Bacchia

Oh the one that we had in Otranto?

[00:19:27.150] - Katy

Yeah. Oh, that looks good.

[00:19:29.370] - Paola Bacchia

I can tell you Otranto is only 80 kilometres from Albania across the Adriatic Sea. That's what I mean about like the connection with the sea. And so at a time when you couldn't travel inland, like we've got cars, we can do it. But you try on those mountains crossing mountains with a horse and cart. You couldn't do it. So you were connected by boat. So that's why the Balkans are actually quite close in culture. Also, the tip of Puglia, like the heel of the boot, has been invaded so many times because it's just jutting out into the sea. Of course, pirates are going to come in. They were invaded by the Greeks, by everyone. So that's the really beautiful mix of cultures.

[00:20:11.760] - Paola Bacchia

But getting back to the octopus sandwich, so Otranto is, again, a walled town that's got a castle and it's all white. So there's a lot of towns that are painted all white like Ostuni. Otranto also looks very white and it's right on the water. And there's, at night time, particularly when the sun sets, people try to get into spots where you can see the sun dropping on the water. And this place where they sold the octopus, they sold only sandwiches that had various fillings. It was really close to a viewpoint, down to the water and close to the sunset. And so it was a grilled octopus because there's a lot of octopus along the coast of and other cuttlefish along the coast of Puglia and in the Adriatic. And it was grilled, charbroiled and it was served with a cheese called stracchino. Now Stracchino is a cheese that.. Like there are a few people who make it here, but it's not like the

Italian one. It's sort of a really runny, fresh curd cheese that's very high in fat content. And creamy. And you think cheese with fish? Really? But it was so good.

[00:21:26.230] - Paola Bacchia

So good. You know, and having a phone and Instagram account really is such a good way to remember exactly what you are at every place you stopped. Because that's what I do. I look through my Instagram page to find, you know, where I ate and where I was.

[00:21:43.120] - Katy

and everyone listening. You need to check out Paola's Instagram feed because photography is absolutely beautiful and you really capture that light that's coming... That I haven't seen yet. But I can imagine and I think it's really special with those white buildings. It gives you like amazing photography opportunities, I imagine.

[00:22:01.960] - Paola Bacchia

Yeah, beautiful, like shadows and every now and then there's a splash of color. Like the border of a door is a different color. And the light, you know, when I do my food photos. Because I do all my photography for my books too, I do all the location photos and all the food photos. And the food photos, some of them I took actually in Otranto where I was renting a house there when I was researching Adriatico. The lady was a fantastic cook and she had so many plates and cloths and surfaces. So it was really good for photo taking. And when I look at the photos that I took there, I think the light is just different from the Australian light. And no matter how much you edit it here, it doesn't look the same. It's that. Yeah, it's that light in Italy.

[00:22:50.230] - Katy

Beautiful. Well, and so if you were to stay in Puglia, I found it really, really difficult to choose a base and in the end I chose for our trip that never happened.

[00:23:05.410] - Paola Bacchia

And it will one day Katy.

[00:23:08.080] - Katy

I know. I know. I keep saying to everyone, Rome is eternal. Italy's waiting. And as you said, they've been making the olive oil the same way for two thousand years. So they're probably not likely to change it in a hurry.

[00:23:21.820] - Paola Bacchia

No, no. It'll still be there. So what were your two bases that you decided on? I think two bases given the size of the region and the length, it's a long, narrow one is the best thing to do. Where were you going to stay?

[00:23:33.310] - Katy

Well, the thing is, I had decided and this is very unusual for me because I like to pack things in, is that I decided that we couldn't do the Gargano because it was too hard. And so we were going to just concentrate on the Southern Salento area. So I wanted to stay in the city. So I decided to stay Lecce and I decided to stay in Monopoli because we wanted some spot by the sea and that's what we decided. But I was also wanting to stay everywhere else.

[00:24:01.960] - Paola Bacchia

Yeah. Look, it's a tricky one. I think Lecce is beautiful. They call it the Florence of the South. I don't think it's the Florence of the South, but it's got these intricate buildings. It's got a lovely, lovely feel. Lecce is very nice. And I think Lecce is a good place to stay. Monopoli is it's got those little blue painted boats that you see photos from Monopoli there, I'm sure you did in staying in planning to stay there. There's beautiful blue and red painted boats that are little fishing boats called gozzi, and that's another great place.

[00:24:41.950] - Paola Bacchia

But where I would... I love the Gargano. I really do. And I do realize that the Gargano is a place you can't go there on the way to anywhere. It's sort of a destination within itself. So for me, how long you have to stay in Bari if you can get it a month off from work, go for a month. If you can't do a month, I did it quite well in two weeks, realising that I missed the whole of the West Coast. So Taranto, Gallipoli. I've never been there and I would like to go there and I'll Altaamura, which is all the side that's not on the Adriatic. So it's on completely the opposite side of the region. Now, the opposite side of the region is only 30 kilometres away, realising we're not talking about big distances, but it is very long and narrow.

[00:25:31.180] - Paola Bacchia

And so I would I think Lecce is a really good point to stay. And I think Bari is also a very good point to stay. I really like it. But it's a bigger town. It's got like a modern part of town too but Bari Vecchia has got a wonderful feel. I think somewhere inland is good too like Ostuni is another nice place, which is again a walled city like there you can eat as much gelato and whatever you want. Everything is a hill. You're always walking up and down. And that's such a good thing about Italy, you can eat two gelati day and and walk it all off. And look in the Gargano there's a town called Vieste which has got an amazing beach scene and a whole lot of beach clubs and really beautiful wide beaches.

[00:26:17.570] - Paola Bacchia

And I know it's out of the way, but if you've got a month, you should definitely give the Gargano a go. It got no tourists, it's got Italian tourists, and that's it. There's also some beautiful islands that are just off there called the Tremiti islands, which are stunning. And you catch a boat there, only in summer though from Peschici. And you should stay in, like if you want to stay in typical accommodation a Masseria is a great place to stay. Now, I must say, Masserie are old fortified communities from hundreds of years back where you had a master and people to work on the land. And it was self-contained too, and walled so it could defend itself from brigands and pirates if you

near the coast that would come and pillage. So that they're sort of fortified structures and they're of various sizes and some of them don't have walls anymore, but they were built so they would be self sustaining.

[00:27:24.620] - Paola Bacchia

Many of them, there are still still abandoned ones. And it's always my dream to find one and buy it and restore it. But people like Colette Dinnigan has done this. She has a stunning masseria, not that she rents it out, but she lives in it. But there are many like Masseria Potenti, which is one that's on Instagram a lot. And I've stayed there. That is absolutely beautiful. They've got a restaurant there. But use it as a base to travel around. They're all on the rather expensive side. But I think it's absolutely worth it. They've plenty of them.. Masseria Li Veli, which is also a winery. There's one that makes cheese Masseria Cinque Santi and Montenapoleone where they do everything a kilometer a zero, which means at zero kilometres and it grow most of their own stuff and then turn into food. So Masseria, if you want to stay in the country.

[00:28:20.930] - Paola Bacchia

Now, if you want to stay in the city, I'm a big believer in Airbnb. Always stay Airbnb apartments.

[00:28:29.120] - Katy

Yeah. Because you get extra space and then you can go out and you know, come back in the day and just chill out. But you see, I mean I was having a good old look obviously because I was searching for accommodation and we were taking the kids with us so we needed a little bit of extra space. But they're beautiful - the decoration, like they're just so stylish and just so lovely there.

[00:28:50.840] - Paola Bacchia

They are. And look, with Airbnb, you've got the ability because the produce is so good, you don't actually want to eat in a restaurant all the time. It's nice if you can buy some of your own stuff, even just to make sandwiches and good cheeses and amazing fresh tomatoes and maybe some marinated artichokes or something and then construct food at home, which you can't do in a hotel.

[00:29:13.340] - Katy

Yeah, that's true. And also there's so much street food there, too. Which I know you know a lot about.

[00:29:18.680] - Paola Bacchia

Yes. Yes. So there is lots of street food there and there's typical street food In Bari, in Lecce. When we talk about food, I think I can talk a little bit if you like me to talk about the food

[00:29:30.230] - Katy

yeah, just go right ahead. I have no problem talking about food Paola

[00:29:35.000] - Paola Bacchia

Yes. Look, I mean, food is a reason why I guess I travelled initially more extensively than otherwise would. And what attracted me to Puglia is the street food because of the warmer weather down south. And in Sicily and in Calabria and Campania, you do find more street food than you do up north because you can be outside more of the year.

[00:29:58.460] - Paola Bacchia

And so for street food, it's not just stuff that's sold in a van, it's stuff that you might stand up at a bar and eat. That's sort of the definition that I use. So in Puglia the street food that we have is something called foccacia barese, which is a foccacia, like a type of bread that is typically from Bari and it has potato in the dough. So it's got a potato that's been like boiled and then mashed and left through the dough, which makes it really moist. And that's studded with like cherry tomatoes and herbs. And so to get that you stand in a bakery, you find the good ones because there's a queue outside and they're Italian.

[00:30:42.020] - Paola Bacchia

And so you follow them and they'll cut you a piece of it. And then weigh it. Because in Italy bread and bakery goods are sold by weight. And so you stand and then you stand outside and it is wrapped in paper and you eat it. But there's focaccia barese, there's panzerotti which pastry that is filled with cheese and tomato. So there's a lot of tomatoes and cheese down in Puglia.. And the pastry sealed over and then the deep fried. So, you know, anything deep fried is amazing. I also found that one in Bari. And then there is in Lecce there's something called a rustico leccese, which is like a little vol au vent thing with cheese and tomato and bechamel and they're also amazing.

[00:31:41.150] - Paola Bacchia

And there is a pasticcotto leccese. So often they're linked to the actual town so pasticcotto is a sweet. And when you do go to Lecce, I'll tell you the place where you have to go to find the best pasticcotto leccese. I can't remember the name of it off the top of my head, but I do have it. I go there in my tour and it's a sweet pastry that's filled with custard and it's often shaped like a little sort of an oval, like a tall oval. So you get special moulds for it.

[00:32:10.160] - Paola Bacchia

Yeah, amazing. But the typical food of Puglia is.. Down the south they don't eat a lot of meat apart from for celebration days because they're they're not as well off traditionally. So there's a lot of vegetables, a lot of fava beans or broad beans and a lot of seafood because most of them have got so much coastline there.

[00:32:34.970] - Paola Bacchia

So the typical dish of the area is called fave e cicoria. So fave that is broad beans. And cicoria is a chicory. Like Italy has a lot of bitter greens that we don't find here. And you try and classify them.. There are so many different ones over there that just growing fields and people just go and collect them because they know what they are. But here you have you just can't find them here. But we can get chicory in winter. And fava beans or broad beans are very typical of this area and like

we've got broad beans in the shop now and you double peel them and you have them in a salad and they're bright and green. But over there they tend to dry them out and have them for many months over the winter.

[00:33:20.240] - Paola Bacchia

And to dry them out, they have a particular festival. So they let the beans grow really big on the vine and then they cut them all down and then they let them dry in the sun until like all the plants and all the pods around the beans all dry up and the beans go really, really hard. And traditionally what they have is the horses then come along and stamp on them to break apart all the dried greenery and plant bits. And because the beans are so hard, the horse's hoofs (now they use a tractor), but traditionally and they would break it apart. And then on a day when it was windy, they would like ...This is all done on a ground sheet. They would lift up the ground sheet and all the lighter bits would fly off and all the beans would stay where they were. And so all the beans would be then collected for the year, which is an amazing story of the whole process.

[00:34:16.730] - Paola Bacchia

It's also like the inventiveness of these people to make do with the little that they have, like the olive oil, the fava beans, the broad beans. And so these beans are then cooked down slowly in water into a mash. And that's all you need, salt and water until it becomes a thick puree. And then you put on chicory and really good olive oil on it. Now it sounds like the simplest of dishes, but it is cucina povera, which is poor mans cooking at its best where it is. Absolutely. It's a stunning dish. It really is.

[00:34:53.130] - Katy

I'd love to try it. It's just something that you probably wouldn't. Well, I'm sure you make it at home do you?.

[00:35:00.170] - Paola Bacchia

I do. I do. Because it's so good and so filling and so nutritious. It's just and I love it. And the bitter greens are an acquired taste, but most of Italy does have that taste of bitter.

[00:35:15.230] - Paola Bacchia

And so fave cicoria is a dish we've got to try. The other thing you have to try it is something called a tiella. Tiella is a one pot dish. And it's traditionally cooked in a terracotta pot, which is called a tiella which the name comes from.. And the most famous or well known is one called tiella cozze e riso. So cozze are mussels. And riso is rice. So it's layers of of mussels and and rice and other and some vegetables in there. I think there is a bit of tomato and that bakes slowly in the oven, and that is also delicious. So, look, they're really well known for their savory dishes, making use of what little there is. And then there's all the seafood like all the, you know, the octopus that we talked about before and the squid. And if you're into it, those oh, God, I can't even think the name of them in English. They the spiny creatures that you get on the rocks and you break them open. Sea urchins!

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[00:36:21.890] - Paola Bacchia

So there's the whole the whole sea urchin thing. If you want to go to a really good restaurant, there's one in in putting in Polignano al Mare, which is another town that a lot of people go to. Polignano al Mare is a town that's again walled. It's right on the edge of a cliff. But if you go just outside the town, you go down to the beach, which I think is the most photographed beach in Puglia, where you've got these cliffs, you can see the town, and then there's a tiny sandy bit of beach. So there's a restaurant really close by to there called Chichibio. And Chichibio is a really good restaurant.

[00:36:59.930] - Katy

That Beach is so famous, isn't it? And these people just jump off into the water from the cliffs, don't they?

[00:37:06.590] - Paola Bacchia

Yeah, they do. From the cliffs opposite where the town is. But you're looking at the town in which some of the town is actually built into the cliffs almost, and they white limestone cliffs and from a few vantage points in the town and usually just follow the people because everyone's going there that you can see the whole beach from the town and photograph it, which is a spot where people take photos. But also looking down from the shoreline down onto the beach and the water's really are clear, crystal blue, in spite of all the ships and everything going up and down the Adriatic, the waters are stunning.

[00:37:44.210] - Katy

Oh, beautiful. What's the sea like down there is how warm is it?

[00:37:49.490] - Paola Bacchia

It's reasonably warm in summer. In winter it's cold. It doesn't stay... It's a big ocean. So it cools down. But it's beautifully clear. It really is.

[00:38:01.580] - Katy

Yeah. I mean, the pictures, if you haven't seen it, everyone is listening. The pictures are absolutely stunning, just the contrast between the sea and the rocks. And it's just one of those magical scenes that made me want to go. Oh, I need to get there straight away. Oh, I'm really starting to feel like I should be there right now.

[00:38:21.440] - Paola Bacchia

And me too. Me too. I was meant to go this year as well.

[00:38:27.680] - Katy

Yeah, we will get there. Definitely. And how about inland a little bit. I know a lot of people like to go to the trulli villages don't they like Alberobello

[00:38:37.190] - Paola Bacchia

And yeah they do. And look I have never been. They don't interest me. They, they just it's the whole .. I know people like to go there and people who I've spoken to have gone there and stayed in a trullo. But to me it's just not what I do. Look and inland you will find Grottaglie ceramics and you will find beautiful masserie and olive oil farms and vineyards of course, because there's a lot of there's always a balance between use of the land between vines and, olive oil. So you know, you do find balance of both through inland. But I have not stayed in a trullo and I have not even seen one. I know. And everyone says it so. But what about the trulli? And I'm like, um oops

[00:39:28.710] - Katy

yeah, but you love the sea. So that sort of makes sense, doesn't it to be closer to the coast?

[00:39:34.670] - Paola Bacchia

Absolutely. It's the Adriatic that got me down to they got me down to Puglia in the first place. So I'd feel a bit I mean towards that if I went too inland, I haven't been there much..

[00:39:46.070] - Katy

So the Masseria I mean, I really wanted to stay in one actually. But unfortunately the time we were going, which was early March, a lot of them weren't open actually. So that's one thing to consider.

[00:39:56.510] - Paola Bacchia

Absolutely. So when you are considering when to go. Its high season starts after Easter, but even then there's usually a few slow weeks immediately after Easter. And it depends when Easter falls in the in the year. Sometimes it can be really quite late in April and other times it's even in March. But March you will find very little open because they just don't have enough tourists to make it ,or people coming through, to make it worthwhile to open. They're small, they're mainly small operators down there, and many of them are family run, which makes it really nice, but they just can't afford to open. So, you know, focus on on different things within their business portfolio, which is usually growing things or making olive oil. Like everyone has, even people with a small amount of land on a house, they'll still have some olive trees and they'll still make their own olive oil and take it to a local press so they can have their own olive oil.

[00:40:48.590] - Paola Bacchia

So you do need to travel in the warmer months of spring or through to autumn or fall, if you're American and listening from there. And if you are hello! And winter, I still think it's a lovely time to go but you won't find as many places open and you won't be able to avail yourself of the water as much.

[00:41:10.180] - Katy

Yeah, yeah. That was a good tip. We just happened to have that time available and I wanted to go see and take some photos that didnt have lots of people in them. Now I think I would appreciate having lots of people in them, to be honest. So. Yeah, yeah.

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[00:41:23.110] - Paola Bacchia

And look at the land. There's not a lot of people in Puglia, a lot of residents there, and there's a lot of abandoned Masseria because people can't afford to have the money to bring it to life again. Maybe it doesn't have running water, maybe it doesn't have electricity. There's all sorts of building issues in many parts of Italy with changing historical buildings or getting old, very expensive to get electricity to a place if they even allow it. So there are some challenges there. And it is a very quiet part of the world where there's no tourists around. But it is beautiful because you've still got the local people there and they're still just as warm.

[00:42:05.360] - Katy

An so would you need a lot of Italian when you go down there. Can you get by with English?

[00:42:12.160] - Paola Bacchia

I think that in the towns, in the larger masserie, so ones that have more rooms and are open for longer, you will get by with English and in the larger towns you will get by with English. But it is useful to have Italian for all the smaller towns, the beautiful towns of Maglie, Tricase, Nardo, Castro, Casarano. You do need Italian. You won't find people there that speak English. Even in the Bari you might find a young person who can speak a few words, but Italian is needed. But that's part of the beauty of it because it's managed to stay away from creating big structures for tourists, which detracts from the attractiveness of it. So there's a balance. And the other thing, you need a car to get around. You need to drive. There's just you know, there is a train that goes through to the major spots and there are the occasional buses. But, you know, for buses, I mean, it's easy to travel on buses now because your phone's got a GPS thing and you can work out where you are because the driver might not speak English.

[00:43:19.960] - Paola Bacchia

So, you know, it's a balance to having the convenience of having English as well as having the beauty of it having being in its natural state, which is without people that speak English.

[00:43:34.090] - Katy

So getting around, I think you definitely need a car. But is the driving, is it quite straightforward? Like is it crazy like Milan or...

[00:43:42.490] - Paola Bacchia

Oh, no, no, no, no. So there aren't there are not many people down there. So the driving is straightforward. You will find there's a major road that goes down along most of the Adriatic coast. So through the back of the Gargano, through a town called Foggia, which is a large town in northern Puglia, and then down it loops towards Bari and then a road down to Brindisi. One to Taranto and then one to Lecce. There are pretty major roads, but not very wide. Sometimes the two lanes or just one lane going in. Either way, the good roads are pretty good roads and they're

not really busy. So, you know, for someone who's been a bit scared of driving on the different side of the road, like we have to, you know, it's it's it's not that difficult. Just have a GPS.

[00:44:36.070] - Paola Bacchia

I always get an Italian SIM card when I travel all the time. I find the plans absolutely worth it for the money so I can have data all the time, not just when I'm in Wi-Fi. I think it's worth the expense. And then you can Google map it and get instructions on where to turn and whatever. And that really helps when you're driving.

[00:44:55.870] - Paola Bacchia

I also spend a little bit extra and get an automatic car because I find the balance of particularly when I first get there, driving on a different side of the road, knowing which way to approach roundabouts and which way to turn. If I have to do with gears and clutches at the same time, particularly in Italy, if I haven't driven there for a long time, I find it too much. And so I get the automatic. There's not many because mainly they have manual cars because they don't use many automatic cars in Italy. But I think it's worth the expense for the safety because, you know,

[00:45:31.450] - Katy

you just want to have your wits about you. Don't you?

[00:45:33.850] - Paola Bacchia

Completely, completely. So, yeah, it is a place where you're much better off to drive. Now you can get by if you just catch, you know get a plane into Brindisi and then get a bus out to the city from the train station or a taxi, and then you walk and then you catch a bus to another major city or a train. There aren't many of them but you will find some. But you will miss all those small particular towns, you will not get to a masseria.

[00:45:58.640] - Paola Bacchia

Masseria are always out in the country. They might have a system whereby they can come and collect you, but they might charge a bit. So you just have to, you know, I think plan your trip quite well unless you've got a car and then you can be a little bit more spontaneous.

[00:46:12.480] - Katy

Yeah, I know my co-host Josie's daughters did a bit of a trip to Puglia on their own. It was a bit of a girls trip - the girls are in their 20s. And they tried to do with buses and trains and ended up in some guy's car, which, you know, I think I think they probably, on reflection, I probably think a car might have been a better idea. And the other thing to note about the public transport is it probably doesn't operate as often as you would think, especially on weekends and public holidays. So, yeah, you can't sort of assume that everything's going to be running as you would expect where you live. Oh, yeah.

[00:46:56.030] - Paola Bacchia

And look, it might not even run on a Sunday. There's just no buses or on a Saturday, it's just one bus in and one bus out. That's how you have to stay somewhere, you know, overnight, because the same bus that came in, the dropped you in is the one going out as well.

[00:47:12.970] - Katy

Yeah. And everyone's quite rightly is sitting down enjoying their Sunday lunch and not worried about getting from A to B.. That's the whole part of the charm.

[00:47:23.850] - Paola Bacchia

Exactly. But, you know, travel is so much easier now than it was 20 years ago because you've got the the power of the Internet which is amazing. And, you know, I follow I think Instagram social media is fantastic for finding out where other people have been and and, you know, and and to follow their trip pretty much and find out how they get around and where they stay. So there are a few people that I have followed through Puglia over the years that have actually given me insight, intends to go to and restaurants to go to them.

[00:47:57.500] - Katy

Yeah, I think Along Dusty Roads is the one that a lot of people know that is kind of they do a pretty good job of Puglia. I think they've got beautiful photos as well.

[00:48:07.670] - Paola Bacchia

Look, I actually go to people like there's a fellow called Frank Prisinzano in New York who's a chef, but he's originally Pugliese from the Gargano. And when he goes to Puglia, he posts all the time and he describes and he stories when he's there. I always say, oh, he's gone there. Take a photo of that. It must be a good restaurant. It's more than just recommended travel sites. It's following an individual person whose taste you might trust. Elizabeth Minchilli is another one who would go to good restaurants or stay in good towns.

[00:48:41.480] - Katy

So, yeah, I always recommend her. I have all her apps. She's got apps that you can download and she's got specific ones for different regions of Italy. Some are paid and some are free. She's she's generously giving away her knowledge for free. And yes, I swear by Elizabeth, actually she's amazing.

[00:49:02.240] - Paola Bacchia

Her daughter Sophie is good too

[00:49:04.940] - Katy

OK, I need to get back on Instagram

[00:49:08.540] - Paola Bacchia

Katy. Instagram is where it's at.

[00:49:11.330] - Katy

OK, I just find it's a bit of a time suck for me you know, because I can go down a rabbit hole and never come out,

[00:49:21.260] - Paola Bacchia

Put an alarm on or something.

[00:49:22.880] - Katy

I think I need to do that because there's so many beautiful places to check out. Now, did you have a particular place that really sums up to you the essence of Puglia?

[00:49:37.190] - Paola Bacchia

Oh, I think Bari and I've already talked a bit about Bari, but Bari is just for me, it's right on the water, which to me is important. It's got a great market. I think going to a market gives you the essence of a town where you see what people buy, like a fresh food market, the fish market, the fresh food market that's outdoors. And I've always .. they make Orecchiette there. I'm a pasta lover. I'm a pasta maker. I make pasta about five days a week. So look to me Puglia has got and the people are so friendly and it's sort of halfway between the Salento and the Gargano. So I'm smack bang in the middle. So I know I've talked already about Bari, but to me Bari sums it up.

[00:50:22.010] - Katy

Oh OK. Well tell us about the pasta then, because it's funny because we were having dinner last night and my son said; we were telling a story about my husband's family and he said, your nonno's nonno. He used to have pasta seven days a week without fail. And Zac said I would have pasta seven days a week.

[00:50:41.400] - Paola Bacchia

Oh. Where's your husband from Katy?

[00:50:45.920] - Katy

They're from Calabria. And also just outside Naples.

[00:50:50.740] - Paola Bacchia

Beautiful. Well, pasta is the pasta of southern Italy. Made with something called semolina machinata, which is semolina flour and it's just mixed with water and semolina flour is the heart of the durum. So it's a type of wheat. So it's not gluten free, even though you find next to polenta in the supermarket and it's just mixed with hot water to make all these delicious shapes. It's a pasta that's thick. It's dense. It catches the sauce really well. It's filling. It's high in protein. It's fantastic. There's none of these eggs, fine flour business ... Like pasta with 14 egg yolks or something. That's for the north who have a lot of them. I've got a lot of chickens and they can use up all the eggs that way. In the south they didn't. So the typical shapes of pasta are the orechietti, which are the little

ears that, they look like little domes you shape over your your thumb. And then the other shape is maccheroni, which you will also find in in Calabria.

[00:51:54.060]

And that is like a tube of pasta that you rub a or you run a metal skewer. Often the spoke of like a bicycle or an umbrella spoke or a square cut metal skewer, and you run it through the middle of this narrow, like rope of pasta to make like an indentation. So it almost forms a circle, but not quite sort of open on one edge. And you put the orechietti there - which look like a little caps - they don't look like ears at all to me. They look like little flipped caps and maccheroni together. And you get a pasta that's called maritati. Now maritati in Southern dialect means married. So when you've got these two shapes. You've got the long shape and the round shape, they're married. So you can sort of let your imagination run wild with that one. But very, very typical pasta shapes in southern Italy. You know nowadays things sort of move across regions and borders and everything, but that was typically what you what you ate in Puglia.

[00:53:06.750] - Katy

The sauces are mainly tomato based down there?

[00:53:09.420] - Paola Bacchia

Yes. Mainly tomato based, because tomatoes grow so well and and also with bitter greens or with chicory or with broccoli. It's something called broccoli rabe. And it's a variation of broccoli where you've got, there's a lot of leaves and very small floral head. You use most of the stem as well as the floral head and the leaves. And the floral head might have some flowers on it. It might just look like a tiny little broccoli and use the whole thing. They're called Cime di rapa that I mixed with, cooked in, like sauteed in a pan with a bit of the good things, garlic and anchovies and chili. I think that's sort of the triumvirate. The three important things in nearly everything for southern Italian cooking is those three. Cook those in the pan and blanch your greens in the pasta, cooking water and then cook some sauteed them for a little bit in the olive oil with the garlic chili and and then cook you pasta and stir that in. That's the simplest variation. And you can have some grated pecorino cheese, which is like a hard aged pecorino cheese to give it that nice saltiness. You could also put some pork sausage in there if you wanted to be a bit nontraditional because they wouldn't have very much pork because it's something for special occasions. So that's a non tomato sauce. But otherwise there's a lot of tomato sauce and also seafood mussels, bits of octopus and and cuttlefish and squid, also artichokes. And a lot of artichokes growing down there.

[00:54:51.940] - Katy

You know, there's some really good ones here in Australia at the moment. I saw them at my local greengrocers. They look big and juicy.

[00:55:02.340] - Paola Bacchia

Well, do you know how to know if an artichoke is good? You've really got to prod it. I know in these coronavirus days we shouldn't be touching everything, but there's no way to tell if an artichoke is

good - unless it looks really sloppy. You need to feel, it should feel firm. If it feels soft, that's like old, really old. So those big globe ones are great for stuffing.

[00:55:25.680] - Katy

Yummy. Well, but just so everyone knows, if you're in the market in Italy, do not go and handle the produce. OK, that is not what's done is it?

[00:55:36.690] - Paola Bacchia

Yeah, well now you go and talk to someone, you say which ones are the good ones. Tell me. I want a firm one and they'll feel it. Although in some places but they don't like it, but some places you can do it. And really Italian supermarkets like when I was Puglia that week, researching in Otranto researching Adriatico on my second book, I found the most amazing artichokes in the supermarket. Like they had a big wooden stand in the middle of the floor, which had hundreds of them with these really long stems and leaves still attached. And I like being able to touch everything in the supermarket, although they want you to put gloves on. And I got like 12 of them for like five euro.

[00:56:20.450] - Katy

Wow.

[00:56:21.260] - Paola Bacchia

I know. And three dollars each

[00:56:25.310] - Katy

It was an artichoke fest.

[00:56:27.330] - Paola Bacchia

It sure was!

[00:56:29.030] - Katy

Stuffed artichokes. Delicious! Well Paola, this has been such an amazing chat. I'm so, so, so desperate to go and do my actual trip that I was wanting to do. Now, I know our listeners will definitely want to stay in touch and check out your gorgeous photos and recipes and find out more about your books and tour in Puglia. How can they do that?

[00:56:54.380] - Paola Bacchia

OK, so they can find me, I mean, I always lead people to Instagram. My Instagram handle is Italy on my mind - all one word. And that's because Italy is always on my mind. So Italy on my mind - so through there, through my profile there, that will take you to a list of like my website and everything. But otherwise you can go directly to my website, which is Italyonmymind.com, nice and simple. I've also got a Facebook page. I don't post on that one very often, but you can still find directions to my Web site from my Facebook as Italy on my mind. And my books. The two books

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I've written are called Italian Street Food, which is 80 recipes of pretty simple, straightforward, a lot from southern Italy and quite a few from Puglia. And my second book is called Adriatico: Recipes and Stories from Italy's Adriatic Coast. And that's got seven chapters that focus on different geographical points of Italy, including two chapters on Puglia, because it's such a long, narrow region, one on the Gargano and one on the Salento.

[00:57:59.270] - Paola Bacchia

And people have used that book as a travel guide. Quite a few people have, to plan their trip, as you mentioned that you looked at it through that book. So I stop in other places like like the Trabocco Coast and the Venetian Lagoon and the Gulf of Trieste.. And my tour of Puglia, which was canceled for this year, but it was not canceled it was rescheduled for October 2021. And it's run in conjunction with a group called Southern Visions Travel that are based in Polignano al Mare or is it Monopoli? It is one of the two. They're based there and they run by an Italian called Antonello Lozito, who has spent time in America. So he speaks English really well and he runs it with a lady called Ali Pike, who is an English lady who has just been naturalized as an Italian citizen. She's fallen in love with Puglia, so she lives in Ostuni. So they organize boutique tours, small group tours for, you know, a couple who want to contact them and they'll plan the tour, organize everything for you. But they also run a few bigger tours, such as mine, which is food based, and it's a six day tour. We stay in two different Masseria. And we focus each day on a different ingredient olive oil, wine, cheese, seafood and so on. So, yeah, so it's it's a hard life, really. There's a lot of a lot of visiting beautiful places and some free time as well. And lots of chances to take beautiful photos too, because I've always got a camera attached to me. I love photography.

[00:59:41.900] - Paola Bacchia

And one more thing. My third book that I'm just about to submit to my to my publisher, Smith Street Books is is about the Istrian peninsula, where my father is from, which is now mainly Croatia and a tiny bit of of Slovenia and an even tiny bit of Italy. But it was Italy when my father was born there. And before that it was the Austro Hungarian empire when my grandfather was born there. So go figure. It's been everything. And I'm talking about the sort of historical and the nostalgic dishes from that area in my third book.

[01:00:17.340] - Katy

Oh beautiful, it is an absolutely stunning area. And I think we might have to have you back on the show to talk about that, too, because I have been there and I loved it so much.

[01:00:29.420] - Paola Bacchia

I can talk about that ad nauseam because I'm in the middle of almost fifty six thousand words on it and eighty recipes and I couldn't get it to go this year again to do more research and to take more photos, you know, like location photos. And also last year I happened to break my ankle when I was in Trieste. So I couldn't go to Istria, but I still had enough photos from the two previous trips to to populate the book. It's full of nostalgic black and white photos, old family photos, old recipes

from the eighteen hundreds, nineteen hundreds and lots of love in the book, lots of nostalgia, old letters, old love letters, stuff like that.

[01:01:10.300] - Katy

Yeah, that sounds amazing. Oh seriously. So everyone, all our listeners, if you go straight away to Paola's Instagram, you can dip right into her dreamy world. Her photos are just beautiful. Grazie Paola I'm looking forward to this new cookbook and to learn more about Istria because I think I only scratched the surface when I went there. But I am also pining for Puglia and I've actually threatened to swim there to Italy in recent episodes, but I guess like everyone else, I'm just going to have to be patient and wait.

[01:01:44.790] - Paola Bacchia

We will. Well, let's hope 2021 is able to open up with things like rapid testing. You know, everyone wants us to travel the airlines, the tour operators, the people who go on tours, who want it. Everyone wants to travel. So I'm sure people will put their utmost energy to making it happen. And hopefully October twenty twenty one will be a goer.

[01:02:09.540] - Katy

Crossing everything, crossing everything. Thank you so much for coming on the show today to share about Puglia and all its delicious dishes with us.

[01:02:18.270] - Paola Bacchia

Thanks, Katy. I love talking about Puglia and I can't wait to go back.

[01:02:25.200] - Katy

Are you a sea and water person? I definitely am, and I can't wait to go and explore Puglia and that Adriatic coastline. On an empty stomach, I must admit. If you're a regular listener, you know how much I love seafood and I'm sure I'd be in heaven trying all those dishes.

[01:02:42.390] - Katy

Another thing I really wanted to mention was that I love how Paola mentioned the Masserie as a great alternative accommodation option, similar to the ones you find in Sicily. If you've never been to Italy before, you might not be aware that this type of lodging exists. And look, they're really a unique and special places to stay. And it's one of those things that you won't be able to do in your own country. So you might as well have a go and check it out. But I love it. They're kind of like mini resorts and they're very nice.

[01:03:13.890] - Katy

Okay, so did you have a favorite tip or insight from this episode? We'd love to know. You can drop us a line to ciao@untolditaly.com or let us know on our Facebook page. It also looks like I have to get back onto Instagram soon, too. Let's face it, I can never have too much Italy inspiration.

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[01:03:33.270] - Katy

We put all the info from this episode onto our website at UntoldItaly.com/46 for episode 46 so you can write down all the towns and dishes that Paola mentioned and check out her gorgeous cookbooks and her mouth-watering foodie tour of Puglia.

[01:03:49.920] - Katy

There's also details of how you can join our Untold Italy Insiders program, where we will discuss this episode, too. In the meantime, have a lovely week. Stay safe and well and Ciao for now.