

Untold Italy Episode 47 - Basilicata

[00:01:00.140] - Katy

Ciao friends, it's Katy here. How are you all doing this week? I know many of you are heading into winter, so I really hope you're staying cozy. Here in Australia. Summer is definitely around the corner. And where there's sun, there's an excuse for gelato. Not that I need one, mind you. Luckily, we have some excellent gelaterie here, but of course, it never tastes quite the same as being in Italy.

[00:01:25.160] - Katy

And speaking of Italy today, I want to take a little pause to send lots of love to our friends over there where the virus is really surging and strict measures are being put in place to stop the second wave. This has been an unspeakably difficult year for many of us and our friends in travel and tourism. Businesses in Italy are suffering terribly. They basically missed their summer season this year, which usually provides the income for the winter and spring. I constantly marvel at their ability to stay positive and hopeful in the face of these challenges.

[00:01:58.040] - Katy

Of course, they have their dark days, but many are busily preparing for your return in 2021 and beyond, with the hope that us visitors will spend more time deeply exploring their beautiful country. And there is hope, as we have seen throughout this year, things can change quickly, and I hope that things change for the better as we close out 2020 and look to a brighter future where travel resumes and we can eat more gelato. So if you're listening from Italy, you know that we really are thinking of you and care about you and we can't wait to see you very soon.

[00:02:31.940] - Katy

Today's guest is someone who has spent a lot of time in deep exploration of Italy's lesser known regions. Author Karen Haid joined us earlier in the year to tell us about the southern region of Calabria, where she spent several years teaching English and researching her book, Calabria The Other Italy. This time, she joins us to uncover the almost secret region of Basilicata that is snuggled in between Calabria, Puglia and Campania, Basilicata has been put on the map thanks to the revival of the unique city of Matera.

[00:03:02.930] - Katy

But it's a region well with dedicating some time to, especially if you're the kind of person who likes hilltop towns and castles, who doesn't really? Karen explores the charms of Basilicata in her new book, Basilicata Authentic Italy. And she's here today to share some of them with us.

[00:03:21.170] - Katy

Benvenuta Karen. And welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast,

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[00:03:24.980] - Karen Haid
Grazia. I'm very happy to be here.

[00:03:27.410] - Katy
Thank you, Karen. When we last spoke, we talked about the region of Calabria, where you spent a lot of time living in teaching English. What took you to the region of Basilicata and what prompted you to write a book about it?

[00:03:40.610] - Karen Haid
OK, that's a good question. Well, after I finished my book about Calabria and I began my blog and all the social media that went along with that, people started asking me, so what's your next project? And I didn't really have a project in my mind. And then I thought, well, maybe I should have a project. And so I started thinking about other regions and I decided on Basilicata also because it's a southern region and it's Calabria's, northern neighbor, and there isn't that much information about it.

[00:04:17.060] - Karen Haid
A lot of people have never even heard of it. So I went the first time I visited it, I thought, let me just see what's there. Perhaps perhaps it is enough for a book. Of course, I always knew about Matera and I had been to Matera, but I didn't know anything about the rest of the region and I was really amazed at how much I found there. And so I said, wow, this this easily could be a book. This could be several books, as in anywhere in Italy, once you start digging, there's just so many layers under the surface in so many ways. So that's how it came about.

[00:04:57.830] - Katy
Uncovering those stories which you are so good at. So now maybe people don't know exactly where Basilicata is. Could you perhaps share where the geography is if we visualize a map of Italy?

[00:05:11.240] - Karen Haid
Yes. Often people say that it's in, and I say often it's in, the instep of the Italian boot. Some people call it the ankle bone because it's such a mountainous area. Basically, it is between .. There's Campania to the West and south west. Yeah. Then Puglia to the east. And I guess you'd say North east and Calabria is to its south. And interestingly, it almost looks landlocked when you look at it on the map. But there are two little accesses to water, so to the Tyrrhenian Sea on the western coast and the Ionian Sea on the eastern southeastern coast. So there really is a lot of diversity in the very small area, because you have tons of mountains, almost half of the whole region is mountainous, then another huge percentage is hills. And so there's only about eight percent of flat land. So this geography does.. It did isolate the region a lot, you know, throughout history. And even now, if you want to drive from one place to another, it could take you a while if you're in the mountains.

[00:06:37.060] - Katy

Lots of winding roads and hills and things to navigate. And it has quite an ancient and complex history as well, doesn't it? So I understand some very different people settled in that region.

[00:06:50.410] - Karen Haid

Yes, of course. It goes back to prehistoric times and there are many very good archaeological museums in the area that tell the story of ancient peoples people before the Greeks and Romans. So, for example, the Oenotrians, the wine people or originally also the Lucanian that settled in that area in around the 5th century B.C. and in the region, what we now call Basilicata was known as Lucania for a long time, or Lucania, they would say in Italian.

[00:07:30.850] - Karen Haid

And interestingly, there is sometimes confusion with the name because Mussolini during the Fascist period when he wanted to sort of bring Italy back to the glory days, he harkened back to the great Lucania. And so the region was renamed Lucania. So between nineteen thirty five and nineteen I think forty seven. Yeah, it was known as Lucania and the people are called the Lucania in Italian or the Lucanians in English. So that's the adjective. So when you talk about food, it would be Lucanian food.

[00:08:13.060] - Katy

Oh interesting. Yeah. And do they have a special dialect there that they speak?

[00:08:18.760] - Karen Haid

Well as throughout the whole country of Italy. Yes. Every little area has its own dialect. And in in Basilicata of course, there is a dialect. Of course, the people who are closer to the Naples area will have a dialect say let's say something more similar to that. So depending on where they are, there is also an area in the Pollino Mountains where there are a couple of towns where they speak in Albanian dialect. But this is these are not new people who would arrived. This is an historical language from the 16th century but they speak modern Italian and their dialect is an ancient Albanian.

[00:09:02.830] - Katy

Wow.

[00:09:03.610] - Karen Haid

You see things like this all over Italy, of course, but.

[00:09:07.180] - Katy

Yeah, interesting. I mean, is there something unique about the Lucanian culture? That's different to the other regions around, you know, Campania Puglia Calabria?

[00:09:21.010] - Karen Haid

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Well, unique. Every place in Italy has something unique or there are elements that perhaps are a little different. As I mentioned, it is a very mountainous region. So when you visit, there are many, many castles on tops of hills because there are all of these these hills. And so it's something that often people don't expect in southern Italy so much. It's maybe the kind of thing that you might think in northern Europe to see castles on on top of hill. So you see a lot of that in Basilicata. There's, of course, Matera, which is just immensely interesting there. They have 150 or so actually more cave churches and there are some also cave churches, caves in other parts of of the region. So the religion, of course, was very important, is very important. And well, of course, there's the food.

[00:10:23.980] - Katy

well, maybe we should talk a bit more about Matera, because Matera is kind of the place that's put Basilicata on the map recently when it gained its World Heritage site listing. And it's been featured by some of the big travel brands like Lonely Planet. And it's a very fascinating place. And I think you know this, but it was on our list of places to visit earlier this year but you've spent quite some time there and maybe you can tell the listeners about what makes it so special.

[00:10:55.870] - Karen Haid

Yes. Yes, actually, as I had mentioned before, Matera was the one place that I had visited in Basilicata before I visited the rest of the region, and it's I guess we can say that it's now on the international tourists trail. Basilicata Matera is in... Some people even think it's in in Puglia because they get off the plane in Bari because that's the nearest airport and they come over to Matera and think they're still in Puglia. But I would say that the interest is the history, the longevity, the fact that the place has been there so long, of course there's prehistoric evidence, but the caves themselves, the fact that 50, 60 years ago. People's ancestors there lived in these places.

[00:11:55.380] - Karen Haid

So there is just this connection, and that is one of the reasons why Matera got that designation for the World Heritage site, was that it was a couple thousand years of continuous living in a settlement. And also the caves, while, of course, at a certain point the sanitation became a problem and overcrowding was a problem. And so they had to be emptied out and it was even looked on as a national shame at one point because the, as I say, the sanitation, the health problems got to be so bad. So people were moved out to new apartment complexes outside the area.

[00:12:43.080] - Karen Haid

However, when they look back and they reevaluated how the people used their water, they say even in modern times, oh, we could perhaps learn from what they did, how they were able to control the water, the little rainwater that they got and how they were able to use it. And they had these cisterns. In every house there was ... A little larger house or in a group of houses. They would have the one system that the families would share. And so now looking back on that, they said there was really.. It was ingenious as a settlement.

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[00:13:18.810] - Karen Haid

And so it was also the European capital of culture last year, 2019. So there was also also that honor. And now, of course, people are coming back and living in the in the sassi, the sassi di Matera. The sassi just means stones of Matera these dwellings that were carved out and some of the material that they used to carve out, of course, then they put and use this building material to live on top and other buildings. But so people are moving back and you can stay in a fancy, fancy hotel in a cave. Now, of course, it doesn't reflect how the people live there in the nineteen early nineteen hundreds. But it's just such a fascinating place to visit now. From the history and they have museums of course of what a cave house would have been like. But they also have museums with contemporary sculpture, contemporary art in these caves. So they're doing many different things. And of course the churches themselves are beautiful, the early cave churches as well as the the Romanesque and the Baroque and the more modern structures. So there's just so much you can see in one place.

[00:14:48.700] - Katy

OK, so they really adapted to their environment, there. And they brought all these elements of different cultures from around Italy, all the, you know, the eras - baroque and renaissance as well.

[00:15:00.830] - Karen Haid

And it's not .. that's one thing that it's a little bit amazing that you think that it's just these caves you know, at first, then you see there's a beautiful old town like you would see in other regular Italian old towns. So, yes. So there are so many different elements.

[00:15:18.960] - Katy

And do you know how they actually carved the caves out? Did they use.. it it the tufa stone?

[00:15:28.680] - Karen Haid

it's not the actual Tufa volcanic stone. So it's not volcanic stone. However, you will see in many books they used the word tufa, but more in sort of a general term, it's Tufa like. So it is easy enough to carve, but it's strong. OK, so yeah, that's an idea.

[00:15:48.710] - Katy

And I imagine.. Does it get quite hot there in Matera? Is it that a part of it? Is that the environment meant they use caves to be cooler or is it is it just they were there and they just decided to carve into these rocks and make their homes?

[00:16:03.000] - Karen Haid

Yes. No, it's not for the heat because, yes, it's southern Italy. So you think. No, it's not for that reason. No, it was, you know, ancient man found something practical. And then even in more modern societies, it continued to be practical. And also in early medieval times, starting in the 8th century or so, monks came from the east, and started living in these caves, some of them that were there or expanded the caves and turned them into churches. And so they also helped to found

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communities there. And there are many of these cave churches that you can see and with these old mosaics and mosaic painting.

[00:16:58.920] - Katy

oh, beautiful, I think it's a really it's a very fascinating place. And did you end up staying in a Sassi?

[00:17:06.230] - Karen Haid

Yes but the thing is.. Now it's sort of pricey. So I managed to find a cheap little broom closet type room in a in a hotel that had these other other rooms, that when I actually had the opportunity of seeing the inside of someone else's room who was staying there at a certain point, I couldn't believe the grandeur of her rooms. But yes, because also you think that a cave everything has to be small. But that's not that's not the case because some of them were used as warehouses or they might have had an olive oil press in them or if for many, many different reasons. So the caves aren't all necessarily small.

[00:17:54.900] - Katy

Right. I mean, it's just absolutely fascinating. And I have actually had a good look at some of these hotels. And I saw some of them are so luxurious. Yes, amazing. Like beautiful places. And we had chosen to stay in one, actually. And it was I think.. In the hotel there was this really beautiful terrace that looked out over this town as well. Oh, well, that's going back on the list, obviously. Yeah. It just sounds like it's such a fascinating place. So that's the main place in Basilicata that people know about. What are some of the other places that, you know, really worthwhile delving into?

[00:18:32.430] - Karen Haid

Right. OK, there is right near Matera, for example, there's Metaponto, which it's the only sort of larger temple that's remaining from Greek times. So that's very interesting to see. And also near Matera, there's the coastline of the Ionian coast. So that is also nice in the summer. But for example, another gem of a little town is Castelmezzano, which is in what's called the Lucanian Dolomites. And so there they use the word Dolomite. It's not like the Dolomites in northern Italy, it's different from a geological standpoint, but there are these jagged peaks. And so it's just this really picturesque town that's nestled in these dolomites. And there's another town, Pietrapertosa, which is just across from Castelmezzano town next door to each other on peaks. And they have put in a zip line between these two. And actually, it's not the only adventure sport Basilicata has has also a Tibetan bridge. And there's also another flight of the eagle. So you're in Castelmezzano. There's this Volo dell'Angelo it's called. And so you get to fly over the ground on a zip line and you're not sitting there. You're actually facing with your stomach down, staring at the roads below. So let's just say one of the many sort of exciting adventures in Basilicata.

[00:20:25.380] - Karen Haid

But then, of course, there's the capital, Potenza, which is interesting and has one of the the best archaeological museums in the region. And that's interesting to see. Basilicata has two provinces,

the province of Potenza the capital, but it's also the capital of the entire region. And then Matera is the capital of the province of Matera. So that's near Castelmezzano.

[00:20:58.800] - Karen Haid

And then I would say another area would be the area of the what's called Monte Vulture or Mount Vulture. It looks like vulture when you spell it. But that is an extinct volcano. And so it's a beautiful area that has some lakes in the crater and the wine is very good from that area, Aglianico del Vulture. And so that's an interesting area to visit.

[00:21:24.990] - Karen Haid

Numerous castles such as in Melfi, Lagopesole and the town of Venosa was named by the Romans and it was a quite a large town on the Appian Way. So that is very interesting because there are the Roman ruins, there is an enormous church. There's just lots of lots to see. And also Jewish catacombs.

[00:21:53.700] - Katy

Wow. So fascinating. Karen's book has really, really in depth detail about a lot of these places, and I have to say I just was captivated by the small villages and towns with so many of them isn't there? And you could just spend weeks exploring them, I think.

[00:22:14.620] - Karen Haid

Oh, yeah. Yeah, you could spend.. Because there are over a hundred I can't remember how many but maybe one hundred fifty or something. But there are a lot of towns so you couldn't, you would take years to, to be able to go to every, every one of them. Another spot is important to see and people would be amazed because it's just down the Amalfi Coast past Amalfi Coast and then through Campania in the south there there's the town of Maratea, which is on the little part of of Basilicata that is on the the water on the Tyrrhenian sea. And there is this incredible Christ statue there that is a little bit like in Rio, but with this beautiful mountainous coastline and with this statue, it's really incredible to see. So that is something that many people would just drive by on their way to Sicily and never even stop in and pull off the road to see.

[00:23:11.500] - Katy

Guilty! Whoops. Wow. I wish I had known about that. And I guess this is the amazing thing about doing these podcasts is that this is what we're uncovering, all these beautiful sites that I guess Italians probably know about. But it's hard.. Unless there's not a lot written in English, apart from the work that you've been doing. So it's really amazing to uncover some of these treasures really that really should have have their light of day in the sun.

[00:23:42.410] - Karen Haid

Yes and as I mentioned in the the Calabria podcast, the between Basilicata and Calabria, there is the Pollino Mountains and it's the largest national park in all of Italy. So there's really so much to

see and so much to do. You can ski in this region. And there are also many festivals, really historic festivals that are very interesting.

[00:24:12.250] - Katy

So did you manage to catch any of those festivals when you were there?

[00:24:17.170] - Karen Haid

Yes. Yes, I did, as a matter of fact. Oh, yes. I mean, there's one in particular that really stands out and it's in the town of Accettura. It's a mountain town. And what they have there is an ancient marriage of the trees and they combine it also with their religious festival of their saints. But what they do is they take one really large tree out of one forest and then a smaller tree out of another forest. Bring them together, the large tree is brought by pairs of oxen, just looks beautiful, having these oxen pulling the the large trees and the small tree by people carrying them. And it takes a full day just to get from their original spot into the town. And then it takes them also a couple of days to put these trees together. And we're talking over a hundred feet high. They put them together on the ground, the carpentry work, raise the tree and people climb up it and and the saint comes marching by. And it's really quite, quite the spectacle. And also there's also the religious aspect. And all ...Every ox has a prayer card on their head and and the procession through the streets with the Saints is also quite moving. So that's just one example of an interesting festival.

[00:25:50.930] - Karen Haid

Potenza, they have a big one called the Parade of the Turks. It also mixes their Saint Gerado with the this sort of historical... it's not a reenactment because it's not exact but yeah, it's sort of an amalgamation of of different elements that they bring together in this parade that has fifteen hundred townsfolk in it dressed all dressed up in costumes. So there are many, various, many festivals.

[00:26:33.200] - Katy

Oh, wow. And when there's festivals there's always feasting. And that's my favorite thing. Yeah. Yes. And Karen, I know you are the expert of going along to these feasts and trying everything out.

[00:26:45.140] - Karen Haid

I love to eat. I have to say, Italy is the right place.

[00:26:49.820] - Katy

Was there any of those specialty dishes that they have in Basilicata?

[00:26:54.350] - Karen Haid

Yes, probably the symbol of Basilicata are the peperoni cruschi is what they're called. Peperoni are peppers. Not not like the things that we put on our pizza in the United States, but are peppers. And peperoni cruschi are dried peppers. It's a certain type of pepper that comes from the town of Senise in Basilicata. They also eat these in northern Calabria. And what they do is they dry them on

their balconies, porches everywhere. So it is really lovely to see because when you go around to the various towns, there's invariably somebody's laundry and then these beautiful strings of bright red peppers. And so they dry them and then they cook them quickly, less than a minute in olive oil. So they become very crispy. Matter of fact. And it was a year or so ago on think it was on Instagram of a certain website or Instagram page or whatever was having the crunch contest. And everybody was making recordings of themselves getting into this as if it was some type of chip.

[00:28:09.570] - Karen Haid

Oh, but anyway, so they get very crispy, so they eat them as just as themselves, by themselves, or they'll crumble them up on top of pasta. So let's say you just might have a simple olive oil and perhaps bread toasted breadcrumbs and then these toasted peperoni cruschi. Or they put them, mix them with other dishes, let's say that might have a bacala, just the traditional cod, and they'll put that alongside of it as the vegetable. So, yeah.

[00:28:48.900] - Katy

Is it spicy?

[00:28:50.840] - Karen Haid

No, it's a sweet pepper.

[00:28:52.440] - Katy

Oh, yeah, yeah, it's interesting how delicious. And what about what about the pastas then? Obviously they probably have a special pasta that they make there. Or maybe they have a lot!

[00:29:06.470] - Karen Haid

of course, handmade pastas, one that you see frequently is these Strascinati. It's called from the verb strascinare, which means to drag. And so it's sort of an oval shape, flat pasta. But you can see that it was it was dragged along fairly long, maybe an inch or two kind of thing. And so you see that. That's, for example, a pasta that that you'll see a lot of.

[00:29:36.740] - Karen Haid

Another interesting vegetable is they have lampascioni, which is with hyacinth bulb. I always forget which flower it is. Anyway, it's the hyacinth bulb and it looks like a onion, like a tiny onion. And it tastes a little bit like an onion, but it's a little bit more bitter. And they'll put those in stews, for example, or might pickle them. So that's another vegetable that you don't see in too many other places.

[00:30:07.530] - Katy

I can imagine if ...Do they eat a lot of meat or is it more of a gamey like rabbit and maybe chickens and stuff?

[00:30:14.720] - Karen Haid

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Um, no pork, pork, pork. And also, they're well known for their adult, what's called the Podolica beef. And so there is sort of an ancient breed of cow, and that's something that you'll see. So something to look for, for example, in restaurants.

[00:30:40.460] - Katy

And what's special about it, it's just it's a type of breed they or is it something a bit like, you know, bistecca alla Fiorentina or is it...

[00:30:50.390] - Karen Haid

You know, it's not how they cut it so much. So they can slice it in any way. Yeah, but it's it's not. Yeah, it's not like the beefsteak Fiorentina. That's the real thick thick one or that kind of thing. No. It would be like any steak but it's just this particular breed.

[00:31:11.230] - Katy

Right. That's good. Yeah. A bit like wagyu if you're Japanese

[00:31:16.380] - Karen Haid

OK. And then of course there's bread to look for, especially in Matera for example. Their bread is very interesting. You'll see it, you might see it in the shops and it has this funny top. It almost looks like a crown, but what it is, is the slice of three knife passes and for the Trinity. So even in the bread there is something significant spiritually.

[00:31:46.940] - Karen Haid

So the bread of Matera is quite good and it has this particular look to it and then they have their famous Amaro, a bitter Amaro Lucano, originally from the town of Pisticci.

[00:32:01.670] - Katy

That's a digestive, right?

[00:32:03.590] - Karen Haid

Yeah, it's one of those. It's one that.. It's a mix of herbs. So it's a dark looking beverage and. Yeah.

[00:32:11.300] - Katy

Do you like those?

[00:32:12.820] - Karen Haid

Yeah I do. I do.

[00:32:14.750] - Katy

I struggle with them a bit because my husband's family has them quite often and they're very herbaceous aren't they? So I mean I have tried them and different ones. So there's different levels

of intensity. But yeah, they're very interesting and it's a different taste that maybe for our palates ... We're not used to that bitter, bitter taste.

[00:32:36.230] - Karen Haid

Yes. The bitterness. Right. Well, then also, it's always good when you're in a small restaurant agriturismo or agricultural tourism type place that you go to and after dinner, they bring out their own homemade version that they might have made from wild fennel or blueberries or, you know, whatever they happen to have. And those are always the best, of course.

[00:32:58.400] - Katy

Did they have a special .. Do they have sweet treats there? Because I like to know about the dessert, too.

[00:33:04.790] - Karen Haid

Um, I have to be honest with you. I am not one who eats that many sweets. Not that I don't maybe like them, but I don't really eat that many of them. So I have to say not that I noticed so much. Yeah, nothing special. I mean, I ate good sweets, good pastries. For example, in there's one, there was one bed and breakfast. I stayed in a couple of times and Potenza where the woman made her own sweets for breakfast and I just I filled myself up and put them in my suitcase to go. But I'm somebody who actually prefers a plate of beans and chicory with a hunk of bread than getting a dessert, so I have to say,

[00:33:57.580] - Katy

OK, I'm sure they've got them. There's a reason to go back to find out.

[00:34:01.930] - Karen Haid

Right. That's true. That's true. I have to do a pastry tour.

[00:34:07.770] - Katy

One of the other really interesting parts of your book is about when you visited the spa in Rapolla. And I think it's really... Like a spa visit in Italy it's not the same as in our countries.. It's very different. And I have been up in the north, but I was wondering what it's like to visit a spa in the south of Italy in Basilicata.

[00:34:28.570] - Karen Haid

Yes. Well, you know, Italy also does have our pampering type of spas. They do have those also. But the spot that I went to and Basilicata in Rapolla was a what we call an old fashioned take the cure type of spa, the kind of place people would have gone to one hundred years ago. And it isn't probably that much different. People go there also with their prescriptions from their doctor, like they have an ache or have certain problems. And and they go and they use the local mud or the water and and you get these mud treatments or you inhale the salt, you know, sulphurous air bases and in various ways, little tubes in your nose or in a room that's filled with it.

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[00:35:30.880] - Karen Haid

And first you go and you have to have a visit with the doctor. And I didn't go with a prescription, of course. But I really.. I mean, who doesn't love hot mud all over them? Right. So I said, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm you know, tired; feeling tired, achy, achy all over. And then he had this little sort of map of the body that that he put X's on to where he was going to put the mud. And then when I'm in the room the first day, the woman she stopped at my feet. And I was like, what do you mean.. keep going! And she said, oh, it's not X off on the on the chart. Oh, I was like, oh well it's OK, you can do it. No, I'm not sure if the doctor wants that, you know, as if you know.. I said, OK, so I had to go back and get them to put the X's on the thing. I said, can you just x that here? She missed my feet.

[00:36:35.290] - Karen Haid

But then I realized that the other people who were going with the prescription, they might have just said, oh, this person needs to have their elbow or their shoulder.

[00:36:44.290] - Katy

Yeah. So it wasn't the full mud bath. Like that's not what they're going for. They're going for a specific ailment and of a specific part of the body.

[00:36:53.740] - Karen Haid

Yes, but there wasn't a bath. It was this one was a where they actually put the hot mud in chunks on you. Oh. You know, on your on the specific spot. So they did use up a lot of mud on me.

[00:37:09.760] - Katy

Was it relaxing?

[00:37:11.350] - Karen Haid

Yes it's really, really warm. Really warm this mud

[00:37:16.990] - Katy

OK. I probably would have fallen asleep.

[00:37:19.480] - Karen Haid

Yeah. No, no but it's sort of prescription based and it's, it's, everything's very matter of fact. So it's not as if you could just sort of, you know, slip them an extra something and say, can I just lie here for another another half an hour?It's like they have their next patient.

[00:37:38.650] - Katy

Right. OK, yeah.

[00:37:40.480] - Karen Haid

So it's very I don't know. How can you say it's very sterile.

[00:37:44.050] - Karen Haid

It's not, it's not fancy pillows and bubble bath.

[00:37:48.940] - Katy

Oh OK. Yeah it's very, it's more clinical. And would you do it again though? Did you feel more relaxed afterwards?

[00:37:54.940] - Karen Haid

Yeah, absolutely. I would do it again. Yeah. And I, I also I've done it a couple of times in Calabria.

[00:38:00.580] - Katy

OK, and yeah. Sounds good right. Now. Karen, I have a question for you. You've described Basilicata in your book as authentic Italy and I was wondering what you actually meant by that? What makes it authentic?

[00:38:15.730] - Karen Haid

It's one of those places where you can go and you.. except for Matera, and you're surrounded by locals and so you have the feeling as though you are visiting a place with the people. The original, the people who live there and and you're not in some kind of place that is was made specially for a tourist. And if you go to the small towns and you walk down the street and the people are curious about you also because they don't see that many tourists, of course, in these places that I've mentioned. The spots that are the to visit spots, but they always are going to have tourists because if there's a good museum or some kind of archaeological site or a special church, people, of course, are going to go there. So they'll they will see tourists. But it's not like in so many other places where it's almost gone in the other direction where you can't find someone who's actually from the place.

[00:39:36.830] - Katy

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think that's true. It's like, I think for me as well, being authentic is really, it's a different things to different people. And it does come down to where people are living their usual lives that aren't interrupted by like a tourist overlay. Yeah, it's interesting. I mean, those little towns, I think it's fascinating how they've just continued on as they had for hundreds of years. And they still ... They have all the modern conveniences, but they just adapt. And you've still got those traditions and the festivals and all of those things continue to this day. And it's just fascinating. And it's so gratifying to know that those traditions continue despite all the noise that we have around us.

[00:40:23.730] - Karen Haid

And of course, I mean, they're struggling because they're they are losing the the ancient ways. It's difficult. Young people, they don't want to go into agriculture or it's not cost effective. Italy is an expensive country, so they can get cheaper vegetables or cheaper things from North Africa or

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other other areas of the world. So, of course, it's a challenge. It's always a challenge. And they're always losing people.

[00:40:57.480] - Katy

The younger people, probably

[00:40:58.740] - Karen Haid

younger people. Yeah.

[00:41:00.990] - Katy

Interesting. Then I guess it's going to be interesting as it goes forward as well, whether how they can maintain those those traditions. But I wonder how much of a role tourism does play in that, because I think people will enjoy going to places that are a little off the beaten track and a little bit more unique and outdoorsy in the future. So hopefully that can spur some innovations maybe to get people to stay.

[00:41:29.130] - Karen Haid

Right. Right. So so that it's not built up to such an extent that it loses the charm. Also, even with Matera, they're looking into that and thinking, well, you know, how many hotels can they build in the Sassi? They really need to have a balance between actual people living there as opposed to visitors. Otherwise, it will then just be, you know, just a place for visitors and it will eventually lose that connection with the idea that people have been living there for two thousand years.

[00:42:07.350] - Katy

That's right. And that's the charm of it. It's a really hard balance to strike, I think. Mm. Yeah. And from the sounds of it, it sounds like you probably need a car if you're going to be in Basilicata. Would that be right.

[00:42:18.840] - Karen Haid

Yes, it would certainly be better off if you want to visit. Small places you can do it. I did one time go there for a month without a car. Also, I had planned on renting a car. Well, I just thought I would, but I didn't reserve it in advance. And I can only drive an automatic. And then I realized that there wasn't an automatic available anywhere. And so I then said, OK, well, I guess I'll just have to figure it out with the buses and the trains. And I went to quite a few places by public transportation. But you really need to plan.

[00:43:03.730] - Katy

Yeah, you can do it. You can do it. But yeah. But how much Italian would you need. Do you need to be fluent?. I'm sure you can get by generally with a few words, but is it essential to have quite a bit of Italian.

[00:43:19.870] - Karen Haid

Well it depends if you want to have a conversation or not. There's always going to be.. you can always make yourself understood wherever you are. You know how when you go to a country that you have no concept of a language and you can always eventually get what you want, but it just depends. Of course, if you go to Matera, they have English tours and, you know, so that's the place that that's completely, completely set up for that. But in other places, yes, there's going to be less. If not any English spoken as in any rural place in Italy, that's true, and I guess so.

[00:44:03.560] - Katy

How long should we spend? I mean, if you were going to get a good idea of the region, you probably have to be spending some time in Matera, which, like it seemed to me, want to spend at least two days there minimum to get the feel of Matera. And then, you know, it sounds like it's a good week, spending a bit of time in the region to go to these hilltop towns and castles. Sounds like a pretty nice way to spend a week, if you ask me.

[00:44:31.340] - Karen Haid

Yes, absolutely. I mean, yeah, less than a week, it seems like you wouldn't you wouldn't get much out of it. But you would be.. Of course, if you if you want to go to Puglia and then you only have a couple of days, you could pop over and see one or two places. So it really it's up to the individual how much how much time they want to spend. If someone wants to do a week and let's say they do three days in an Matera and then go to Castelmezzano and Venza, they could just do that. And that would be very nice. So yeah, time is precious as we know. And so sometimes when you run from one place to another and you want to see this and that, and then you just realized, wait a minute, I really just want to stay in this place and just sit here and, and just look at the woods or I just want to do something that that is not so active you know, within a vacation sometimes.

[00:45:29.990] - Katy

Oh, you mean you don't always want to go on a zip line?

[00:45:33.050] - Karen Haid

You don't always want to go on a zipline!

[00:45:38.630] - Katy

This has been so interesting Karen. Basilicata definitely seems like one of those places worth spending some time to explore. Can you tell our listeners how they can find your book on the area and how they can stay in touch with your work?

[00:45:50.930] - Karen Haid

OK. Yes. So the name of my book is Basilicata Authentic Italy and it is widely available. It's in paperback and also electronic versions. So if you go to Amazon in any country. Also I have a website that is just my name, Karen Haid dot com. And on that website I have links to where you can get the book in various countries. So sort of makes it a little bit easier in various countries. And then I also have a blog on my Calabria, the other Italy dot com website, and I have many, many

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posts about Calabria, of course, very in-depth post with a lot of photos, a couple of about Basilicata as well.

[00:46:45.350] - Karen Haid

And I have numerous social media pages. I have one just for Basilicata with the book's name, Basilicata, authentic Italy, one for Calabria, the other Italy and you know, Twitter. And what's the other one? Instagram under my name. And I also have a YouTube page. So that's called Karen in Calabria. But yeah, so and I had started tours of Calabria and I was planning on adding Basilicata to them before, of course, the virus came in, so hopefully, hopefully in twenty twenty one will be able to do something in a visit to these beautiful places.

[00:47:38.110] - Katy

Let's hope so. It just sounds absolutely magical. So grazie for sharing your knowledge of Basilicata with us. I know many of us relish the chance to discover these hidden pockets of Italy and you have quite the knack of uncovering them. So thank you for joining us and I'm really looking forward to what you come up with next.

[00:47:57.940] - Karen Haid

Thank you very much.

[00:48:01.270] - Katy

So what do you think? I'm intrigued by Basilicata and would love to spend some time exploring there. Would you stay in a cave or a sassi hotel in Matera? We had one booked for earlier this year and I don't know who was more excited, me or the kids. They had some absolutely stunning properties in that city. And if you're interested in photography, there are endless opportunities to take photos. I'd also love to experience a festival like the one Karen mentioned with the marriage of the trees and explore the hilltop towns of beautiful Basilicata.

[00:48:32.860] - Katy

As always, all the details and places mentioned on the show up on our website at Untold Italy dot com forward slash forty seven for episode forty seven. I have also added a link to Karen's book Basilicata Authentic Italy to the page too. I was lucky enough to read the book and you really get a great insight into the region and its little towns and those quirky experiences that you can only get in a unique and special region like Basilicata.

[00:49:00.580] - Katy

So honestly, my list keeps growing and growing and I guess when it comes to future trip planning, it comes down to prioritization and mapping out the most optimal itinerary. We always want to see as much as we can without compromising on those quiet moments and hours at dusk when the sun is dipping under the horizon and casting shadows on the piazza. So if you want to discuss your Italy trip ideas and immerse yourself in all things Italian while you can't be there, come and join us on Untold Italy insiders. This is the place where people wanting to travel to Italy mingle with local

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experts who help them with those all important itinerary questions and uncovering the experiences that they want to have the most, whether you're planning your first trip or your 15th.

[00:49:45.970] - Katy

We have experts who know Italy's highlights and lesser known regions to answer your questions and share with you their love, of all things Italian. Thanks for listening to Untold Italy as always. If you've enjoyed the show, do leave us a rating or review. This helps bump us up to the top of the feed on Apple and other podcast apps so we can reach more people with our love of Bella Italia. So that's all from us this week on Untold Italy. We hope you have a wonderful week ahead. And just keep dreaming of Italy Ciao for now.