

# Untold Italy Episode 54 - Solo travel tips for an exciting Italian adventure

[00:00:00.420] - Katy

This is the Untold Italy travel podcast and you're listening to episode number 54.

[00:00:12.700] - Josie

Ciao and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, I'm Josie.

[00:00:15.790] - Katy

And I'm Katy, and we're here to help you plan your trip to Italy.

[00:00:19.630] - Josie

Between us, we have many years of travel experience and we want to help you uncover your own as yet untold stories and adventures in Italy.

[00:00:27.670] - Katy

Each episode, you'll hear practical advice, tips and ideas to help you plan your own trips to the magical land of history, stunning landscapes and a whole lot of pasta.

[00:00:36.520] - Josie

We'll have interviews from experts and focus on local destinations and frequently asked questions about travel in Italy.

[00:00:43.630] - Katy

Thanks for listening and make sure to subscribe to our show.

[00:00:46.720] - Josie

Now let's get started on your regular dose of Bella Italia.

[00:01:01.230] - Katy

Ciao a tutti! How are you all doing today? It's Katy here with a much requested episode that I know you're going to love. If you've ever been inspired to visit Italy after reading Elizabeth Gilbert's book, Eat, Pray, Love, or the movie of the same name starring Julia Roberts, then this is the episode for you. You may remember the author eating that incredible looking double mozzarella pizza in Naples or that wistful moment as she gazes out over Rome from the Castel Sant'Angelo.

[00:01:32.490] - Katy

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Did you wonder how brave she and maybe I could do that too. Today we're talking about women traveling solo in Italy, how to prepare, what to consider and how to make the most of your time there. It's been a long while since Jose or I traveled solo in Italy, so I asked along an expert to talk us through her experience of this style of travel. Even if you don't intend to travel solo, this episode uncovers some great tips for planning the type of trip to Italy that suits you, particularly if you want to get in touch with more local experiences beyond the sightseeing highlights.

[00:02:06.500] - Katy

Before we introduce our guest, though, I wanted to do a big shout out to all of you who left such amazing five star reviews for us and to read some of them out, Grazia! Grazia! We so appreciate every single one of you who tune in faithfully and send us such lovely messages and reviews. Here are just a couple.

[00:02:25.690] - Katy

"Great podcast" with mswetha413 via Apple Podcasts, hope that right - in the United States and they wrote:

[00:02:34.570] - Katy

"This is one of the best podcasts I have come across. I feel really connected to Italy and not being able to visit this year was tough. Listening to this show has helped me re-live my own memories and has given me so much more information and ideas on what to do next on my next trip. Thank you to the host for creating this great show"

[00:02:52.300] - Katy

Awww - grazia, thank you so much for the lovely review. That's really kind. We loved it. Thank you so much. The second one is from Pjbsch via Apple Podcasts, and that's from the United States too. And they wrote:

[00:03:09.160] - Katy

"Bringing back wonderful memories. First trip to Italy was at Christmas time many years ago. We have returned often to other regions, taking all of our teenage nieces and nephews. Thank you for resurrecting memories during this difficult time. Be well."

[00:03:24.490] - Katy

Thank you so much Pjbsch, that made us being from ear to ear. What a wonderful way to share time with your nieces and nephews by taking them to Italy. That's a dream that I too share and I hope that can be realized one day.

[00:03:39.310] - Katy

Grazia, thank you to everyone who leaves us reviews. We are so happy our podcast is a little escape for you. This is a very dark season for many of you, especially in the northern hemisphere right now. We are thinking of you and holding on to hope that we'll see some brighter days soon. For now, though, we dream of Italy. And you know what? Talking to our

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guest about her experiences there and ways that you can enjoy your Italian trip too when it's safe to travel is just another perfect escape.

[00:04:08.560] - Katy

Our guest, Sierra Bush, has literally written the book on solo travel in Italy for Women. Launched just this week. Sierra's book, *The Ultimate Guide for the Solo Woman Italy* bridges the gap from finding that spark or inspiration to visit and explore Italy on your own, to making it a reality. Sierra's story starts with a study exchange in Tuscany and has taken her on many fun adventures. But I'll let her tell you all about it in her own words.

[00:04:35.240] - Katy

Ciao Benvenuti Sierra and welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

[00:04:40.430] - Sierra

Thank you. I'm really excited to be here. Thanks for having me.

[00:04:43.550] - Katy

Oh, it's great Sierra. Now, I mentioned in the show preamble that we had many requests for an episode on solo travel in Italy, particularly for women. But as it had been so long since I had traveled that way in Italy, I really wanted to get someone on the show to talk about this style of traveling who had a lot more recent experience. So I was very excited to find you. And can you tell our listeners a little bit about yourself and what brought you to Italy?

[00:05:12.590] - Sierra

Sure, so I'm the founder of Creative Edge Travel, so we help people experience Italy's far flung places and those fading traditions, the phenomenal nature through genuine connection with the local people. And I first fell in love with Italy in a way that a lot of people fell in love with Italy. So I was actually studying abroad in a small town called Cortona. And you might know that from *Under the Tuscan Sun*, the town where that story actually took place. So before I went to do this semester in Italy, I studied Italian just on my own between classes because I knew I wanted to be able to kind of break outside of the student bubble. It was an American campus over there in Cortona and really immerse myself with locals. So as you can imagine, that opened the doors to so many incredible experiences that I just never imagined I would get to have.

[00:06:06.110] - Sierra

And I also discovered a different side of myself that I didn't know existed through speaking a different language. And I just felt so alive there. I was more confident and just fell in love with the culture. So a few years later, I was traveling Italy for a few weeks with my mom and I realized, well, she needs to get back to the States for work and life duties, but I was at a period in my life when I didn't necessarily need to get back. And so the light bulb went off and I decided to do a homestay and I ended up staying with a family for between 6 to 10 weeks. I can't remember exactly, but I was making artwork for them in exchange for room and board and excursions around the area in Campania. And during that period, 6 to 10 weeks

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was a really long time for this family to have a guest in their home. So I kind of wanted to give them a little break in the middle and I decided to take myself solo to the island of Ischia and Ischia, if you don't know, is off the coast of Naples. And I probably really learned to fall in love with solo travel on that trip. I had traveled solo before and it had been a little bit awkward and I was really consumed by my mind was very preoccupied with people that I wish were there experiencing it with me. And so this trip to help me break through that and helped me really love solo travel.

[00:07:33.890] - Katy

Wow! That does sound amazing on one of my top lists of places to visit, mainly because of Elena Ferrante books. I don't know if you read those, but I'm very excited to visit Ischia myself. But apart from visiting Ischia, what were some of your other favorite experiences traveling solo in Italy?

[00:07:53.000] - Sierra

Oh, my gosh, there are so many. And I feel so blessed that even now, during good times, I can just get this little bit of a memory from some random trip and it just lights me up. So a few of my favorites from a period when I was living in the region of Puglia in southern Italy. A couple of weeks after being there, I kind of fell into this group of friends that was the perfect group to fall into because they were really active and getting out and enjoying their area. And maybe three or four weeks after meeting them, they actually threw me a surprise birthday party. And this was just so special and so meaningful. Even my friends and family back home had never throw me a surprise party. And it just felt so beautiful. Just to get to experience those kind of everyday celebrations and just observe from the outside is already special. But to be the center of it was incredible. And another experience during that time was getting to go into the countryside and go cherry picking. Puglia has the most delicious cherries - are just amazing. And we went with my friend Marcelo, my friend Marco and Marcelo's parents who are in their late eighties. And I really had the sense that I was getting to partake in a tradition that had been going on for generations to get to go out to the same place in the countryside where they go every year and pick cherries and enjoy getting to share them with friends and neighbors when they get back. It just felt like it really connected me to the culture and the traditions.

[00:09:24.710] - Sierra

And of course, you can imagine these Italians in the countryside playing music and joking around and decorating me with cherries. They hung cherries all through my hair and my clothes and stuff, just being silly. And then another amazing memory from that time was during the festival of the patron saint of Bari. There was a Pizzica concert. And if you don't know what Pizzica is, it's the kind of traditional folk music and dance of the area. And my favorite Pizzica band was playing in this piazza at night and the piazza was full of people. I was there with the same group of friends. This was another trip and also that old eighty nine year old couple that I mentioned before. And suddenly in the middle of this concert, the lead singer stops playing and announces that they have a special visitor and he doesn't know how in the world she got from America to this concert in this town in southern Italy, but he

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announced that it was my birthday and the whole concert and band or the whole piazza and band sang happy birthday to me. And that was really unexpected and fun. And then we spent the rest of the night just dancing with this eighty nine year old couple in this piazza past midnight. And you could have sworn they were just 30 years old like me. So really amazing memories. And those are just a few of many.

[00:10:51.400] - Katy

Oh, wow, I don't think your birthdays are ever going to be quite the same again.

[00:10:55.660] - Sierra

Absolutely not. I always try to be in Italy when my birthday comes around.

[00:11:02.740] - Katy

So, yeah, I can imagine everyone else is under a lot of pressure now. Sierra's friends back home in America. So like all these amazing experiences, I think - it's very similar in a way, not very similar, you have your own experiences, but I think the essence of it is captured by Elizabeth Gilbert's book *Eat, Pray, Love*, and obviously the movie starring Julia Roberts. But I think getting from that vision from if you've never been traveling in Italy solo before to that dancing in the piazza with your new friends, how do you get from that point when you know you've got that dream to planning a trip?

[00:11:45.580] - Sierra

Yeah, it's a really good question. And I think a lot of people struggle with making the dream a reality, like you said. So for me, one of my biggest tips is to break past what I call the fear fog. So the fear fog is this just sense of the unknown that we get all up in our heads about. So it's normal for your body to avoid addressing that fear fog because it's so unknown. You don't know exactly like how you're going to do it or how much it's going to cause it's just overwhelming.

[00:12:19.390] - Sierra

And so sitting down to break it down and understand what exactly it takes can help a lot. It can help just to look at, well, what does a flight to Italy cost and putting/creating a budget and figuring out a savings plan, even if it's going to take you five years, knowing what you need to be saving every month or even each week can really kind of give you a sense of control and power over reaching this goal that you have.

[00:12:43.540] - Sierra

So taking time to write down the things that are going to be required to get yourself there is really helpful to cut it into physical terms instead of just this general fear of the unknown happening. And then once you're past that, when you're actually starting to plan, I actually encourage people to think about what is your intention for the trip? What's the vision? Are you traveling to reconnect with yourself? Did you have a really heavy, difficult year and need time to just, like, let it go, or are you looking to meet new people and be excited and re-inspired? So those different visions are going to require different types of

destinations, whether you decide to stay in a city versus a countryside. If you decide to stay in just one place, the whole trip or visit many, whether you decide to stay with locals or a hotel, things like that. So for me, if we go back to the example of my very first solo trip in Italy with the home stay with the family, my intention was to be immersed with locals. My vision was to be speaking Italian with locals and discovering hidden places without tourism. So that's why I veered towards something that was really going to put me in the homes of locals for a long time. And then once you've kind of figured out what your vision is and the type of trip that will support that vision, then you can move on to researching accommodations, transportation and flights and getting those logistics in place. So it's really just about mapping it all out and then dividing it into smaller, achievable goals.

[00:14:18.430] - Katy

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I think, look, I'm one of those big picture people that loves to - I can definitely tap into those feelings that you want to have when you're there and really find the power behind the inspiration. But yeah, I think you're absolutely right, when you get to the planning, you've just got to chunk it down and get into realistic pieces that you can manage at one time. It's great. And I think maybe as well, you know, you don't have to have like two months or even a month, do you? You can get these glimpses of experiences even if you have a shorter amount of time.

[00:14:56.200] - Sierra

Oh, yeah, absolutely. That's why it's really important to choose your activities wisely and to not get distracted by visiting kind of bucket list sites that you feel like you have to go to just because they're famous and you feel like you have to do that while you're there, but it's not actually something you are interested in.

[00:15:15.070] - Katy

Absolutely, and I think Italy is such an amazing destination that has so many different experiences that you can have. Now, I particularly love all the art and history and architecture. That's my jam. I love it and the food, I forgot to mention. But, you know, that's not for everyone. And if you're really into nature and getting at and hiking, which I do you love too, but it's not my main thing. There is so many opportunities to do that in Italy. You can make any trip that you like. Really, can't you?

[00:15:46.870] - Sierra

Right? Absolutely.

[00:15:49.000] - Katy

So apart from the concerns about planning the trip and getting it sort of mapped out, what about when you're on the ground? Did you have any concerns when you were first there about did you have any fears about traveling on your own?

[00:16:03.040] - Sierra

I think my biggest concern was probably using public transportation, getting myself around, because I grew up in the Appalachian Mountains where the only public transportation I had ever used before getting to Italy was the school bus, which came to the end of my driveway. And I didn't have to worry about being on the correct side of the road to be in the right direction. And that's still messes me up sometimes I'll be on a bus in Italy and realize, wait a second, this is going away from my destination, but, you know, so, well, I will say that I've definitely learned with public transportation to ask, ask and ask again.

[00:16:42.040] - Sierra

So as soon as you get to the station, check out the people standing at the stop too, and ask if it's the right bus and you're in the right place. You just double check. And what I get on the bus, I show the driver where I'm planning to go. You don't even need to have any Italian language to do this. But just showing them on your phone, I want to go hear the gesturing - they understand what you're saying. And so I ask them to kind of confirm that I'm in the right place and to let me know when we're near my stop. And then I also use Google Maps offline. So you don't actually need to have any data or connection to use it. And you can kind of follow the dot as it goes and you'll see that you're going towards your destination, not away from it, and be able to see when your stop is coming up. And I also realize, like when you're afraid of missing your stop or you're afraid of being on the wrong/ in the wrong place, then you were extra on top of it because you don't want that experience. You're therefore more organized. You're arriving much earlier than you really need to. So you have time to check and you're asking multiple people on the way. So you kind of just naturally take care of yourself in that regard. Another concern that I would say my parents had, more so than I had, was my safety staying with a family that I'd never met. And so for that situation, while I did it through a website called Workaway.Info, which I really recommend for finding homestays, and once I had connected with the family and arranged the terms and what I would be/ the type of work I would be doing for them in exchange for room and board, I added them on Facebook and then I actually asked a couple of their random contacts on their friends list, told them what I was planning to do, and asked if they would recommend for a young girl alone to be staying with this family. And so just kind of reading these glowing reviews about how wonderful this family is really put me at ease. And my parents.

[00:18:40.360] - Sierra

And then I also had the chance while I was traveling with my mom beforehand to stop and have lunch with them on our weird kind of driving between, I think, Matera to Paestum. And I was able to stop in and globally and have lunch with them. And so that really put my mom at ease and helped me get a feel for what their vibe was going to be and how well we'd be getting along. So I recommend that as well. But then also, when it comes to safety, I think the biggest thing and the best daily reminder to give yourself, especially as a solo woman traveling in Italy, is to tune into your intuition. I think we often forget that. And it's the most powerful source we have to know when we need to be on our guard. But really common sense goes a long way. And it's a lot about the preparations that you do ahead of time.

[00:19:31.360] - Katy

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Absolutely. For example, I think in the big cities, like any big cities in the world, you probably wouldn't walk around in unknown areas and badly lit areas by yourself, would you? So you wouldn't do that at home. So you probably wouldn't do that when you're abroad either. So definitely the common sense element definitely comes into it. What about in the cities? I think that's- regardless of how much time you're spending in the country, you're probably going to have to go through Rome or Florence or maybe Venice at some stage. Are there any particular ways to think about safety in the city?

[00:20:06.430] - Sierra

Yeah, so I definitely always keep a sharp eye on my luggage. I never let it out of my hands. I've seen too many movies where someone takes their hand off of it to buy a ticket will quickly turn around and it's been swiped. So I always have my luggage if I'm stopping to get a ticket the luggage is in front of me between myself and the ticket machine or the ticket person. And I have guarded it with my legs and then never wear my backpack on my back. It's always going to be in the front. I don't have any zippers or pockets that are on the outside of bags that have anything important in them. So, of course, that's kind of basic travel knowledge. But I think also thinking about where you want to stay, a lot of younger solo travelers are on a tight budget and so they'll book the hostel. That's a 30 minute bus ride away. But what you need to think about also is the way that you want to travel. Do you want to have to be back in a room by 8pm because you don't want to be walking the streets at night? Or is it worth it to pay a little bit more but be able to be right there in the city where there's people moving around right outside the door? So you never have to worry about being on a quiet, dark street and that kind of thing. So sometimes it's worth paying a little bit more, especially if you're a new solo traveler, to be in a situation where maybe you have twenty four hour service desk at the hotel. So there's always someone that's watching who's coming and going and is available to you if you need anything.

[00:21:34.390] - Katy

Yeah, and I think hospitals are very different to what they were like when I was traveling as a solo traveler. Look, they can be pretty luxurious almost. You can get private rooms, if you like, and a private bathroom. And it depends on what level of financial flexibility you have. But what I also love about the hostels is a lot of them organize group activities that you can get involved in. Should you be feeling the need for company they've really evolved since when I was solo traveling.

[00:22:06.160] - Sierra

So, yeah, absolutely. There are even luxury hostels popping up because the trend right now is this idea of connection when you're traveling, whether it's with the locals, but also fellow travelers. And so they've definitely added a lot of single rooms that you can book at a hostel so that you can still have your privacy and a cleaner space, that you're the only one using the bathroom instead of 20 other people. But you'll still be able to walk outside your door to the common room and easily meet international people or attend the events, like you said, that the hostel puts on.

[00:22:40.800] - Katy

It's really fantastic. And I think it's not just for younger people either, really. So I'm a little bit older than Sierra, but the last solo trip I was actually to Spain and it was just. And similar one of these hostels, and it was similar like people my age, older, younger. It was just a really lovely environment and people really just wanting to go and experience the place. I really encourage people to go out and seek out those hostels. I don't know if you've got a list, but if you don't, I have offered a list of some of the hostels in Italy that are in some of the big cities that are that are fantastic to stay in, actually.

[00:23:15.560] - Sierra

Yeah, that's wonderful. I've even seen families staying in hostels fairly often Italian families. So it's great.

[00:23:24.460] - Katy

What about meeting people? We did cover a little bit there, and I know you said you've had some really creative ways of meeting people. So doing a home stay and staying in a hostel. Is there any other ways that you meet people in the room? Because even though, like you said, solo travel, sometimes it's about finding yourself, you do maybe want to have a little bit of connection while you're on the road?

[00:23:46.780] - Sierra

Oh, absolutely. That's that's a huge part of travel. And I think it's so exciting to get to your new accommodations and get to meet other people and hear their accents and go, where are you from? And then be able to go out to get a coffee and talk with the barista and get some local tips. So I think it's really important aspect. So I think the first tip that I usually give is that you have to come into it realizing when you're trying to connect with local Italians, that especially if you're in a tourist city, they are bombarded by tourists day in and day out and not necessarily nice tourists either. So you have to really actively work to differentiate yourself from this mass of tourist and demonstrate that you genuinely want to learn so you don't have to speak fluent Italian. You don't even have to learn any Italian. I definitely recommend it, but every little bit that, you know, helps you forge that relationship and build that bridge of connection. So one tip that I often advise people is to learn compliments in Italian because that's something that really opens them up and builds a bridge of connection between you. Besides learning compliments in Italian - actually side story - when I was first studying Italian on my own between classes and my little university coffee shop, one of the lines in our vocabulary I was studying out of this textbook, I think it was called Italy, maybe Italian made easy. I'll have to look that up and put it in the show notes. But one of the lines that I learned was *il tuo giardino è bello*, your garden is beautiful. And I was thinking, oh, I'm so tired of learning phrases. You know, when you're learning a language, they tell you to learn phrases like the pen is on the table or just random things you will never need. And I was convinced I will never use that line. But lo and behold, I found myself walking around Cortona during a break between classes and walked by this little home where there was an old man outside tending to his garden. And I was able to use that. And I was so happy and so proud of myself. And it just feels so good to be able to compliment the Italians on

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their culture, the way they live. And they're so into the details of life and beauty. So definitely learning some compliments in Italian.

[00:26:03.640] - Sierra

And then another tip that I give for connecting with locals is to learn some slang or local dialect, because that's going to peak their interest when you're talking about trying to stand out against the crowd. If you're/ if you walk up and say Ciao in a really slang /local dialect way, their ears are going to perk up and they're going to get curious about you and they'll be asking you the question. So that's a really fun tip, too.

[00:26:28.120] - Sierra

And then another really great way. If you're not so good at kind of putting yourself out there and just talking to strangers, it can be intimidating. You can go to meetup.com and look for a local language exchange group. So Meetup has just all these different meetup events and you can find some really fascinating, fun things to get into. But if you just look for a language exchange group, you're going to find Italians that are getting together to practice English. And so what a perfect way for you to help them with their English and also save space for you to practice Italian and meet local Italians.

[00:27:05.410] - Katy

I love it. What are your favorite slang words then?

[00:27:08.920] - Sierra

Oh, my gosh, that's a really good question. I, I don't because they're so hyper local, I don't usually retain them for very long, but I usually ask people how to say Andiamo in different dialect. So in in Bari it's Chamanin. In Itlaian it's Andiamo' let's go - and then Bari dialect it's Chamanin. So it's fun.

[00:27:34.840] - Katy

Yeah. So many different ways to - I love the dialects in Italy. My husband speaks the Neapolitan dialect because his mom's from there.

[00:27:43.780] - Sierra

Yeah. I just wanted to share one more tip for meeting locals because it's really my passion. So if you take yourself out for a drink or a glass of wine, position yourself at the bar, because that is where people are going to be coming to order their drinks. Usually people will go individually to order their drink and while they're waiting on their drink to arrive, it's the perfect opportunity to start up a conversation. And I remember one time meeting this gentleman and he was with a group of different girls and guys and they started talking with me. And the next thing I knew, I was headed to dinner with them at one of their favorite restaurants and they were ordering all these local dishes for me and a full like 3 or 4 hour meal and then hanging out more afterwards, so it was really beautiful. So I definitely recommend being strategic about where you set yourself when you're at restaurants or in bars.

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[00:28:38.340] - Katy

Yeah, and I think as well, you've just touched on something is that you have to then at that point trust your intuition, don't you? So a lot of people might think, oh, my goodness, you went off these people that you hadn't met to a restaurant. But I guess you do at some point have to have to go with the flow and trust your gut around that and obviously use your common sense as well. So, you know, there was a few other women in that group, that that made you feel comfortable as well.

[00:29:09.570] - Sierra

Exactly. And also, there have definitely been invitations that I have turned down. It's really important to talk about safety. And the tips that you put into place before traveling are really important. So at a very basic level, using WhatsApp to share your live location with a trusted friend and knowing at what point they should start to worry because they haven't heard from you from X number of hours. So I always set an alarm for myself to remind myself to check in with a friend and let them know that I'm doing OK or that I got home safe because I often will go out and just have a nice time and totally forget about my friend that's back home, worried about me, so that's really important.

[00:29:47.610] - Katy

Oh, you sound like you've got some pretty good tips in place. Now, I mentioned at the start of the show that Sierra has actually written a book called The Ultimate Guide for the Solo Female Traveling, solo woman in Italy, actually. And so she's got lots of these tips in that book. And we'll be obviously sharing that with you on the show notes. But I think common sense just really, really goes a long, long way in any travel scenario. And, you know, even but even to forgive yourself, if you make a mistake, I think because you are going to make mistakes. And I think that's part of the adventure.

[00:30:24.000] - Sierra

Yeah, absolutely. I think that's kind of that's a big part of what builds you and gives you that confidence is coming across these challenging situations and maybe having a moment of, oh, dear God, how have I gotten myself here? But then figuring it out. And it's just kind of reassures you that you have your own back. You can trust yourself and you can do hard things. And I think that is part of why solo travel is so beautiful is that you get to really learn what you're made of and recognize what an amazing person you are that you can do all these cool things that not everyone will do. And it's just an incredible experience.

[00:31:03.630] - Katy

Yeah. And then you come back with all these stories and it'll impress people. But I don't think that's the point of it. The point of it is to impress yourself that you can overcome these obstacles and do something that you never thought you could do and you find it completely amazing.

[00:31:18.510] - Sierra

Yeah, it's definitely not to impress other people because I've finally learned not to really even talk about my trip unless someone asks me and is genuinely curious about it, because it's this strange thing that happens that I go on this trip and have such a moving, maybe even life changing experience and then to come back and try to tell someone about it and see them kind of get dis-interested after just five minutes or less is a little bit heartbreaking. So I've learned to kind of guard that space. Those memories hold a certain power for me. And if you're sharing it with people that don't genuinely want to know, you just kind of like watering it down, if that makes sense. But yeah, it's really it really is for your own experience and your own memories and special moments. And you can't really ever translate that to anyone else.

[00:32:09.050] - Katy

That's so true. You mentioned you were traveling around by bus a little bit. Did you also did you ever hire a car or rent a car to get around on your own?

[00:32:19.710] - Sierra

I did. Well, I've done that several times and I definitely had to be convinced of it the first time around. It was something that I just never even considered because I was no - like it didn't even cross my mind. It was just way too overwhelming. But I wouldn't recommend it for first time solo travelers but I do think it's really beneficial if you've kind of gotten used to the basics of traveling in Italy, it saves you so much time. I used to travel on a shoestring budget and I would be waiting for hours for the buses that would never come and finally decided, like, you know what, it is worth the extra money to have that freedom to explore anywhere you want to go and to be able to get out to these tiny villages that no one's ever heard of, where you can have your own experience, not following a guidebook or following an itinerary that so many people have done before, but truly your own unexpected adventure. And that's really powerful and special. That being said, there are definitely some tips you want to keep in mind for renting a car. One thing is when you go to pick up the car, often you'll have to take a number. The line to check in and get your car and even if you've got there a little bit early to pick up your car, you might be waiting for a long time. So you actually want to get there a couple hours early and get your number ahead of time, so that you so that you can actually get out of town at the time that you had planned to.

[00:33:39.770] - Sierra

And then also the ZTLs - the zona a traffico limitato. So limited traffic zones, which basically surrounds the historic centers of cities that you can't go into. So taking some time beforehand to look those up, asking the car rental company if you will have a window, sometimes they'll have a window between pickup and drop off when you'll be exempt to fines for being caught in a ZTL, especially if the agency is located within one. And of course, learning basic traffic signs and that kind of thing, learning that when you go to get gas, their culture is to have you stay in the car and they'll come and ask you what you want and fill you up for you. But it's a really, I find, it's a really empowering experience because it's always going to be a little bit nerve wracking but once you start to get the hang of it, you really kind of embrace your inner

italiana and get a bit more aggressive and more confident and you kind of discover this alter ego personality coming out just so you can kind of ride with the locals.

[00:34:50.060] - Katy

You do find that you become a little bit more, I'm going to say confident, not aggressive in your driving. I know I drove a section of the road in Genoa. Oh, my husband was in the car, but he was asleep, so I'm calling that solo driving. It was pretty intense, but I did feel good after I'd done it, to be honest. I was thinking, well, if I can do that, bring it on.

[00:35:15.470] - Sierra

Exactly.

[00:35:16.100] - Katy

What's the next thing. Oh, goodness. All right. So maybe we've spoken a little about the practical things. And you did give a hint of some of the favorite places that you have been to on your travels. But did you have a few favorite areas in Italy that that you'd love to explore again, or would you really recommend that a really great for solo female travelers?

[00:35:39.610] - Sierra

Oh, my gosh, I get overwhelmed with that question because so many things pop up in my mind. For the first time Solo Traveler, I would recommend to stay in a main city like Florence. That doesn't, I mean, there's such a debate about Rome versus Florence, but personally, I find Rome a bit chaotic and less comfortable and safe compared to Florence, which really doesn't feel like a big city. You can /it's very walkable and the train system is well connected to medium sized or smaller towns such as Lucca. So you can more easily take day trips. So for first time travelers, I think staying in a main city and planning to just zip out on trains that go between main stops because those stay pretty regular.

[00:36:24.560] - Sierra

If you've been before and you're ready to kind of take a little bit more of adventure, maybe hop in a rental car, then I really love the area of Barga. It's the area is called Garfagnana, and it's north of kind of above Lucca, north of Lucca. And of course, if you're wanting to stay really busy and be around a lot of people, maybe it's not the best place because it's a lot of really, really small, really, really quiet villages that sadly are kind of disappearing, which is another story. But hopefully by rerouting this tourism to these smaller places, we can spend our dollars there and a good way that can support sustainable tourism. But anyway, it's just a beautiful area. There's a there's a town called Isola Santa and it's a lake, a small lake with just a really tiny, tiny town. But it's a stone village and just in the middle of nowhere with these huge mountains towering behind it. And it's there's no one else there except maybe a local fishing. It's just incredible. So it's a lot of places like that that I really fall in love with where I can just chat with the locals and hang out for a bit and not feel like I need to be go-go-going all the time and seeing a lot of topsides.

[00:37:43.780] - Katy

Yeah, that's a beautiful part of the world, we actually spent a week in that area a few years ago and it is stunning and I'm actually hoping to get another guest on the show to talk specifically about that area. So you'll have to tune in. OK now Sierra, did we miss anything? I think we've covered we've covered the accommodation, getting around, staying safe. We haven't talked about eating so much.

[00:38:06.100] - Sierra

I was just going to say that how can we not talk about food?

[00:38:12.940] - Katy

So sometimes going out on your own for dinner or eating at a restaurant may not be if you haven't eaten on your own, ever, or if you haven't tried it, then it can be a little bit daunting personally, now that I have a family, sometimes going out for a meal by myself is actually a massive luxury. So but everyone's in a different space. So how do you approach eating when you're traveling solo?

[00:38:40.720] - Sierra

Oh, I have fallen completely in love with the indulgence of taking myself out to eat. It definitely, I mean, it still will feel a little bit strange when I first sit down and I'm alone at a table. But first of all, I think the next time you go out to eat, look around and see if there's someone that's on their own and notice that you're not judging them. You're not thinking anything about them. So once you realize that, then when you're that solo person, you can kind of remember, oh, yeah, they don't really care. So I'm just gonna do my own thing. But I, I find that if I'm feeling a little bit too on the spot, then I pull out my journal and catch up on the day's journaling. You can keep your content creator like me, your editing photos, and you can even be like chatting, catching up with friends and family back home while you're waiting for your food to arrive. But I really have learned to put everything away and just enjoy the moment, reflect on the fact that my own two feet and my own risks and courage and planning to take this trip have brought me to this specific, beautiful moment at this table in this quaint little restaurant in Italy. And you just soak that up and enjoy ordering yourself a multi course meal, get a glass of wine and people watch. And then the best part is that when the food comes, you're not trying to juggle conversation with eating. You can actually take really slow bites, enjoy it, eat mindfully, really notice the texture and the flavors. And even I like to jot those down in my journal and keep keep track of new flavors and combinations and cooking ideas so that when I get back I can kind of recreate it.

[00:40:24.130] - Sierra

But yeah, I just absolutely love dining alone. And another thing is that waiters will often be curious about you, especially if I'm jotting in my journal that sometimes they think I'm a food critic. So that always starts an interesting conversation. And then oftentimes I'll end up with a free limoncello or free tiramisu just because they want to make me feel comfortable and they want to learn about me and why I'm traveling on my own. So just I say just embrace it.

*Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes*

Let people be curious about you. Enjoy being the mysterious woman in the corner with a story, you know.

[00:41:01.630] - Katy

I love it. Well, one of our guests on an earlier episode, Holly, she ended up with a husband from doing that, so.

[00:41:07.930] - Sierra

Oh, boy, that sounds like a story.

[00:41:11.860] - Katy

Well now she lives on Capri, so, yeah, it is a bit of a story, but

[00:41:17.110] - Sierra

That sounds like a winning dinner!

[00:41:17.470] - Katy

It was, it definitely was. OK, well, actually, one of the things I like to do is join a food tour because if I'm craving a little bit of extra company, then, yeah, you can join and meet fellow travelers and you can maybe try a few more dishes than you would and discover a few more places that you might not have the confidence to do on your own. So that's that's my two cents into this.

[00:41:44.770] - Sierra

Yeah, that's a great tip too. Yeah. I also like to offer to buy someone lunch or dinner if they/ if I needed help with something, it's really easy to say, hey, can I thank you, can I buy you lunch to to thank you, you'd really be doing me a favor, keeping me company and that can open doors as well.

[00:42:03.190] - Katy

Look at you! Making friends wherever you go. That's fantastic. Oh, this has been so interesting, Sierra. It makes me wonder how I can add some extra solo travel time into my Italian adventures next time I'm there. Can you tell our listeners how they can find your book on solo travel in Italy and how they can stay in touch with your work?

[00:42:23.470] - Sierra

Yes, it's called The Ultimate Guide for the Solo Woman in Italy. And the subtitle is Eat, Authentic Shop Local, Travel Off the Beaten Path. So it has both practical logistical tips, but also ways to even what dishes to order in each region and really how to connect with locals. So they can pick that up at [creativeedgetravel.com/shop](https://creativeedgetravel.com/shop).

[00:42:48.360] - Katy

Great and are you on any social media - what's your favorite social media that you like to mingle on?

[00:42:53.040] - Sierra

Oh, yes, I love Instagram so you can find me a creative.edge.travel and you can check out my stories and see what I'm up to in Italy and meet locals that I've connected with and just get inspired for your trip.

[00:43:09.440] - Katy

Fantastic. OK, Grazia Sierra, for giving our listeners some inspiration and practical tips on how to travel solo in Italy. I know that Eat, Pray, Love inspired many dreams of a solo Italian escape, but it was little light on the details, I think, on how to actually go about it. We really appreciate you sharing your experiences and tips and look forward to the success of your ebook, The Ultimate Guide for the Solo Woman in Italy and restarting your tours when international travel is possible again. Thank you for joining us.

[00:43:42.300] - Sierra

Thank you so much. This was such a wonderful conversation and it's really heartwarming to get to talk about Italy. So thank you for the opportunity.

[00:43:49.830]

You're welcome. Thank you.

[00:43:51.870] - Sierra

Ciao.

[00:43:54.030] - Katy

Well, I don't know about you, but I now have visions of myself dancing in a piazza with fresh cherries for earrings, what wonderful memories Sierra shared. And that's exactly what it's all about, isn't it? Whether you are creating them on your own or with your travel companions, it's those memories that you cherish forever. And as one of our listeners reminded us in the beginning of this episode, it is the memories that we can hold on to when the times are tough, just like they are now for many of us.

[00:44:23.750] - Katy

Interested in learning more about solo travel in Italy as an extra bonus to accompany this episode, Sierra wrote us a wonderful article with ten great tips for solo female travelers in Italy. I popped a link to the article, as well as the books and places she mentioned into the show notes, if you'd like to learn more and if you're very serious about having your own solo adventure in Italy, Sierra's book, The Ultimate Guide for the Solo Woman in Italy, is out now and available to buy online. I don't believe there are actually any other publications out there with the kind of specific information women traveling to Italy on their own would find useful, so it's a welcome addition to Italian travel guides for sure.

[00:45:04.010] - Katy

Now, if you like the sound of meeting the locals and really immersing yourself in Italian life and culture, then we would love you to join us in Untold Italy Insiders. This is our online piazza, where we chat with locals, many of whom who have appeared on the show and get all the insider tips on how to make our trips to Italy full of wonderful memories. And while we wait to be able to travel, we learn how to make authentic Italian dishes, which ones to try at home and when we get to Italy. And we also have deep dives into cultural sites such as Pompeii. Members are also able to access a library of digital resources like itinerary, planning, spreadsheets, itineraries, trip planning checklists and more. You can find out more at [UntoldItaly.com/Insiders](https://UntoldItaly.com/Insiders).

[00:45:49.280] - Katy

That's all from us for this week. Next week, we're going to Piedmont, a beautiful northern region that somehow flies under the radar, but is home to one of my favorite places in Italy. Grazie, thank you for listening. And ciao for now.