

Untold Italy Episode 57 - Tuscany's Chianti region with Arianna Cini

[00:00:00.120] - Katy

This is the Untold Italy travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 57.

[00:00:13.300] - Josie

Ciao and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, I'm Josie

[00:00:16.390] - Katy

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

[00:00:20.230] - 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.

[00:00:28.280] - 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.

[00:00:37.150] - Josie

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

[00:00:44.230] - Katy

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

[00:00:47.320] - Josie

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

[00:01:01.700] - Katy

Ciao Amici. Hello friends. I'm Katy and welcome to this week's Untold Italy episode, where we are taking a trip to Tuscany. Are you as excited as I am? Tuscany's one of the most popular regions of Italy to visit, thanks to its position in the center of the country and its beautiful landscapes. And also it has Florence as its capital. Now, you may remember the wonderful book and film Under the Tuscan Sun, which also brought the rolling hills and pretty towns of the region to the attention of many of us.

[00:01:34.310] - Katy

Tuscany is a very large region, however, and it's actually the size of the state of New Jersey in the United States. So instead of tackling it as a whole, this is the first in a series of episodes planned for 2021 where we look at some of the provinces or areas within Tuscany and explore their treasures. Tuscany is very much on my radar because at the end of last year, I was selected by the Italian tourist board for a hosted trip to the region. I am so excited to go back to Tuscany and uncover secrets to share with you all as soon as travel is possible and safe.

[00:02:10.070] - Katy

Before we get started, though, and introduce a lovely guest for today, I wanted to let you know about a special podcast episode that we will do next week. In this episode, I will give you an update on the situation in Italy and answer some of your burning travel questions. We run regular Q&A sessions like this Untold Italy Insiders program, and they always uncover nuggets of useful information that most people planning to travel to Italy can use. So, if you'd like your questions answered on the show, please send them through to ciao@untolditaly.com and I'll do my best to answer as many as I can. Now back to Tuscany and I'm so excited to introduce a wonderful guest to you today. Arianna Cini grew up in the hills of Chianti, and with her love of her country on her sleeve, Arianna and her husband Alessio run intimate tours in the Chianti region, where you'll meet the locals and discover the soul of Tuscany. I won't tell you much more as Arianna does a fabulous job of doing that herself.

[00:03:13.090] - Katy

Ciao, Benvenuti Arianna and welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

[00:03:19.280] - Arianna

Ciao Katy, thank you so much for having me. And I look forward to sharing our story with you all.

[00:03:24.910] - Katy

Oh, we're so excited too. But before we start talking about your beautiful part of Tuscany, I'd love you to tell your story to our listeners.

[00:03:33.400] - Arianna

Thank you so much for this opportunity. Ciao tutti, first of all, from Toscana name is Arianna Cini and I am the owner of KM Zero Tours - a small company I owned together with my husband Alessio. We are based here in the beautiful Chianti regions of Tuscany where I was born and where we live. And we specialize in arranging beautiful itineraries that can be from one to more days here in Tuscany. It's all about meeting the producers and having, you know, listening to their stories and establishing relationships and friendships with them. This is the whole concept of our project. This is also the reason why we decided to call ourselves KM Zero Tours. KM Zero refers to zero distance between you and the producer. So, zero distance in terms of interacting and having relationships and most of all creating memories so that once you're back home you will be having friendships for your whole life and a reason to come back again and again.

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[00:04:33.410] - Katy

That's wonderful. And how did you come to these concepts? Like, it's a beautiful idea. How did you create that with your husband?

[00:04:40.780] - Arianna

So I graduated from the University of Foreign Languages. So my passion has been one with the languages. I'm interacting with people and sharing stories. The passion of my husband Alessio - he graduated from farming and agriculture. And so his passion was about the farmers and interacting with them and everything concerning the food and the wine and the people, the producers. So we decided to combine these two passions and to do tourism with food and wine. So that was the very beginning. And the very first question we asked ourselves was if a very best friend from a different part of the world, would visit us - where we wanted to take him or her. So that was the very beginning. So instead of thinking people as clients, we think of people as friends, so as very best friends. So where would we take them and which kind of experience we would love them to have? And so that was the beginning of our selective process of finding, first of all, very selective producers and collaborators here. So to find the very best unique people who were willing to invest time and their passion and to share their homes and to share their stories.

[00:05:55.690] - Katy

Oh, wow, that's amazing. You know, I just love those stories. And it's true because the memories that we have of the time that we've spent in Italy, they are about those connections with people and the experiences that we've had - the slower experiences and interactions and the food and the wine. And, you know, it's very important to be able to have those experiences in Italy if you want to experience the true country, I think. So you're based in Tuscany, in the Chianti region. Can you tell us a little bit about Chianti and where it is exactly?

[00:06:33.610] - Arianna

Yeah, Chianti is a tiny area within Tuscany. Tuscany is the main region, of course, is composed of towns like Florence and Pisa, all those that are famous, and Lucca. And also it's composed by countryside areas and Chianti, the Chianti area is a very specific area in between Florence and Siena. We are very close - it's 30 minutes from Florence. And it's all about these beautiful rolling hills, plenty of vineyards, olive groves. It's beautiful colors. And it's about the stone villas and homes on top of the hill, these hill-top medieval towns. It's a wonderful place to live. We've been blessed. It's a bit of paradise and we perfectly know how blessed we are. And that was one of the reasons why we decided to do our best to share it with others as well.

[00:07:29.230] - Katy

Did you grow up in this area?

[00:07:31.030] - Arianna

Yeah, I was born here. I was born in this little village where we sleep, which is called Mercatale in Val di Pesa and not a lot of people know about it because it's like maybe two hundred people live here. It has been challenging as a teenager because there is no high school. So to get to high school I had to go to Florence and that would mean that I had to catch two buses and I had to leave home very early and then to come back very late. And of course I had all my friends were staying in Florence. They could meet for, to study together and I was all the time on my own. So that has been challenging - that kind of years. For the rest of my childhood, and then as soon as I could get my driving license.

[00:08:19.350] - Arianna

And now here we are right here, I took with me also Alessio, my partner and my husband, is not from Tuscany, he's from Abruzzo, which is another region of Italy. We met in Bologna, just to make it more complicated. And then I decided to, I mean we decided, of course, together to come back here as a couple and then to start this business together.

[00:08:45.040] - Katy

Oh, wonderful. So if you were driving to Florence, how long is it how far is it from Florence?

[00:08:50.950] - Arianna

Well, it depends on the time of the year because, like everywhere else, the rush hour it can take even an hour. Usually, if there's no traffic in, let's say, 30, 40 minutes, you are in town. So it's a great opportunity because when you are here, it looks like you are in the middle of nowhere in the sense that there's only a beautiful countryside, unspoiled countryside all around you. But in the end, you have Florence 40 minutes away, so you have an airport, a train station there. So you're never isolated. You live in a peaceful environment, but you know that whenever you want, you have a town which has everything available very close. So it's a perfect balance, let's say, I would say.

[00:09:38.080] - Arianna

Yes, we'll get onto day trips in a minute, because I think obviously people want to experience Florence and the countryside close by Chianti is just so close. So it's one of those places where you can easily get to. Hmm. But what is so special about Chianti Arianna? What is it that makes it so special for people that live there, but also for people that are visiting? Why do people keep coming back?

[00:10:06.660] - Arianna

So I think one of the most special things we have in our countryside is, first of all, the rhythms of our days and also our lifestyle, the warmth of the people and the fact that in the countryside we have a very strong community. So something that it's a very different experience that, of course, the landscape, the colors, the views, the sunsets, the wine, I don't really need to tell you that much about it because you know the wine, the olive oil and the cheese. We have it's an explosion of flavors and colors here. But mostly, I think the main difference between being based in a town, or in a city like even a small city like Florence and

then coming here for a day or more days, you experience a totally different event. When you're in Florence and Rome and any other Italian town, there's so much art and things to do. You have so many inputs. You go out and you have so many things to do - it can be sometimes overwhelming. In terms of so many things you absorb and so many feelings, so many emotions. So it's a lot. When you come here, you totally relax in the sense that - people here, they live in a totally different way. We live in a much, let's say, relaxed. It's laid back. We help each other. There is a small community. We are less people, but we all know each other. So during the winter, we, most of the time we stay inside our homes. We have fireplaces and everything. So when it gets to the time to meet people, we are so excited so we can't wait to open our homes. And so the beautiful thing, the great opportunities that people have here and more rare to have it in a city - is that here you can really get into somebody's home and learn their personal stories, meet their families, their children, and be part even just for a few hours of their life. In towns, what happens is in most of the cities is that people tend to divide their private lives and their business life. And so they tend to protect their private life a little bit, you know? So you stay in hotels, you go to shops, you go to, - but it's more where you go to museums. But it's all about places meant for a sort of activity. It's more rare to get into people's homes and to learn their personal stories. So this, I think, is the most important part, let's say, of something you can only experience in the countryside, which we love.

[00:12:54.750] - Katy

Yeah, absolutely. It's really interesting, though, because some people in my group have said to me that they originally didn't want to go to Italy because they thought it was all churches and museums and art, and I'm like - no, no! You can have so many different experiences in Italy, like in the countryside, on the coast anyway. But I mean, you're in the countryside and so you've got all these amazing - apart from obviously the people and the warmth of the people and you've also got these amazing, beautiful places that you visit too haven't you?

[00:13:30.190] - Arianna

Yeah, also the little villages, for example, there are some of the most famous villages like Greve in Chianti or Panzano in Chianti - those are famous, but it doesn't mean that they are touristy, it just means that they are the most well known little villages. But even in these more well-known villages you never are overwhelmed. So many people are asking me, have you ever had the feeling to have a packed village - is it ever packed? No, because here it's more spread out. So it's all about small villages, a lot of them, and then with a lot of countryside. And just so there's one little village and then all the beautiful fields and the vineyards and everything. So people are never packed all in one spot. The only place which can become busy, busy - that's why it's important - we know the best time is where to go to these places Like San Gimignano it's very famous - it's outside from the Chianti region. And San Gimignano can become certain times of the year busy - and that it's all about knowing the best times and the best days. And that needs a little bit of thought to best arrange. But other than that, most of the little villages are very quiet all the time. There's just a few shops, a few attractions - very laid back. And so it's a very peaceful experience.

[00:15:02.080] - Katy

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Lovely. And what are some of your favorite towns there in Chianti Arianna?

[00:15:06.910] - Arianna

I love every village here. There are, for example - Greve and Panzano - they are villages which have a lot of meaning for since my childhood in the sense that, you know - it's where I would go for gelato, or for - it's only ten minutes drive from where I was born. And they are lovely. They have a beautiful view. Panzano has this very famous butcher Dario Cecchini and in Greve they're all the artists. So those are the places that most of the people already know, at least, you know, their name once before coming here. And so it's always a pleasure to come back there. Then there are some hidden gems which most of the guests don't know before coming here in person. And once they're here, it's something new to discover for them. And it's a great challenge for us to share also something new and let's say a little bit more unknown. And some of those villages are, for example, Montefioralle - we should skip by. It's a little town. It has only 70 (seven zero) inhabitants so it's a micro, tiny, little village, which is gorgeous. It's like walking into a fairytale. And then also there is Certaldo which is another hill-top town and village where we love to go because we have many activities around there. And it is also the birthplace of Giovanni Boccaccio. So there is a lot of things, lots of stories to tell and then also some Abbey's like Badia a Passignano, it's a monastery from the 13th century, I mean it's wonderful, it's um - the monks still live there and the opportunity to go is a wonderful monastery in the middle of nowhere. So there is vineyards then there is boom - this whole monastery and you, actually it's possible to do the tour given by a monk.

[00:17:02.290] - Katy

Oooh.

[00:17:03.910] - Arianna

So there's the monk sharing the whole tour. It's crazy, you know, they share their kitchen. They have a beautiful kitchen, which is there since the Middle Ages. And they they share with you the whole story of how they would cook in the past and how this tradition has been held until today. So all those things are things that probably, you know, for us locals they have a wonderful meaning and a lot of people from other parts of the world, they may not know about them until they come here.

[00:17:34.940] - Katy

Yeah, that's beautiful, I love those traditions, you know, from my country where we haven't really documented traditions for a long - mostly recently, and although we did have people that lived here for much longer than European settlement, but it's just to have those traditions being passed down, passed down and passed down and talk about it's so special, I think. And, you know, I think that's something unique that you can have in Italy and to learn about that. So I know you mentioned/ you've given me some / a few notes that we were going to talk about and I did mention Sagre, and that is actually one of my favorite things to talk about. The food festivals - are there many amazing food festivals in your area?

[00:18:22.180] - Arianna

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They are, they are, and this is also one of the special reasons to come and visit. I love sagrae and festivals here also, especially in the summer, but then there are festivals a little bit all year round. There's also the medieval festivals, which are wonderful with the special clothing that people are dressed the same way they would dress in the Middle Ages. Even the coins - you go at the entrance to the Euros and they give you back the medieval coins and then there's no glass because of course at that time it wasn't in glass so they give you - you drink the wine into these pottery glasses, and you have only a wooden spoon because of course there wasn't any forks or knives or metal then. So they give you the pottery, the pottery plate and the pottery cups and then you have a wooden spoon and you basically need to turn it out. So it's kind of Italian, but in the end, it works out wonderful also because in this Certaldo I mentioned before this beautiful little village, hill-top village and also another beautiful town Monteriggioni - I don't know if you've ever been, but it's wonderful. It's like a castle. We go to the towers and it's amazing to see that and that town which is really like perfectly preserved, with people, people only dressed in the medieval style. With the coins. With the pottery. It really is to be in a movie. And it's wonderful. And the sagrae as well, the sagrae in the place, the festival, mostly about the food. It's mostly done in the summertime so that people can eat outside and they place these long tables and you sit down and there is a theme, for example, the Porcino sagrae or the vino nuovo, you know the new wine, new olive oil, of course. And everything is an excuse. It's the way, let's say, la sagrae for example, is about the fresh pasta. You basically have a theme. The whole concept of the sagrae is that you create a theme and then you create the whole menu around that theme in order to give value and importance to that value. But of course, mostly but also to the relationships and the community. And so there is volunteers from the village who cook. They have no income back. Let's say it's a whole volunteer thing. It does for spend time together and to keep value to the tradition.

[00:20:55.330] - Katy

Yeah. Amazing. Amazing. Absolutely. I think I've mentioned it a few times on the podcast, but if anyone's listening, you need to seek out these sagrae because they are just an amazing experience not just for the food, but also for that sense of community. I think it's lovely. So I think we do need to talk about food, though, because I'm all about the food. And are there some special dishes from your area of Tuscany that we should know about?

[00:21:23.830] - Arianna

There are many specialities. So now, let's say, in the winter time we have, let's say every every season has some specialities ok? So the big specialities now, during this time of the year, are always with the olive oil, so the new olive oil - which is a big celebration and a very large celebration of the year. It's the last big harvest that we are having, because after a whole year, you know the fruit and then the grains in the summer and then you know in the fall you have the wine and then you have the saffron and then you have the truffles. Olive oil is the very last of these harvests. And so it's probably among all the harvest, it is also the most important because it's the one which closes the year. And so with a new olive oil, we have so many recipes and one of the specialities is the Ribolitta. You may have heard about it. We have in Tuscany the cavalo nero, the black kale which is earthy, it's rich in flavor and is

delicious and we cook this soup, which is called the Ribolitta, which means re-boil, so boil it twice with the cannellini beans, the kale and of course, the olive oil. And it's delicious. It's perfect. It's a food for this time of year when we have the fireplace and everything, then chestnuts, now is the time for chestnuts. So it's all about chestnuts. Roasted chestnuts and all sorts of chestnuts ever. We do also the pasta with that chestnuts. We do everything with chestnuts. Also we do our cake, which is the Castagnaccio. So chestnuts in English is Castagna and we do Castagnaccio which is a cake we have on it this time of the year, which is based on chestnut flour and then pine nuts and then new olive oil, rosemary and raisins and it's delicious. So yeah lots of specialities.

[00:23:23.060] - Arianna

Now it's the time also of the Cinghiale, so the wild boar. We saw a huge wild boar the other day coming back home. So those wild boars they are real. I mean, here they run - deers and wild horses boars run freely in our woods. So the Cinghiale, parpadelle it's wide, like wide tagliatelle with the Cinghiale. And then, of course, the Bistecca alla fiorentina, it's another big thing here in Tuscany, which is the steak, the Florentine steak.

[00:23:53.750] - Katy

Yeah

[00:23:53.750] - Arianna

Just to give you a little taste.

[00:23:55.790] - Katy

Oh my goodness. So how big are these boar that run around the countryside. I'm just trying to picture how big it is.

[00:24:03.380] - Arianna

The other day I took a video, it was huge. They run at night. So it's fun because sometimes we have guests here and it looks like, really a safari because we go maybe out for dinner and we're going back to the farmhouse or you know, the b&b or whatever. And they're on the street. There are some deers. And the wild boars they're big. They can be very, very big.

[00:24:30.140] - Katy

Are they dangerous?

[00:24:30.870] - Arianna

They can be. When you're driving the car, you know, there's not and let's say they are outside only at night. But let's say that can be dangerous if you can find them with the little kids and that case, you know the mama can become protective. But not really. They they want to escape. They don't like to have problems. They'd prefer to thrive and not become pasta sauce.!

[00:24:55.230] - Katy

And are they eating something special, like, do they eat the chestnuts?

[00:25:01.070] - Arianna

The chestnuts and the other of these kind of seeds they find in the woods. Yeah, they love all these kind of things. They are wild so ...

[00:25:11.180] - Katy

So organic I guess. Simply organic with out trying. That's probably why the meat tastes so good too right?

[00:25:18.050] - Arianna

Also, it's lean. It's very, very tasty. It's a wonderful special food.

[00:25:22.410] - Katy

Mmmm. And I know a lot of people want to know a little bit about this Bistecca alla fiorentina. And, I mean, people who just think, oh, it's a steak, but it's not. This is a whole - you need to get from the cow. It needs to be the right cut. Are you able to tell us a little bit about that?

[00:25:40.730] - Arianna

Absolutely! Now it's a - first of all, there's a big thing some people don't know is that it's, as it is called, the Florentine steak. So many people who also stay with us for a week, they don't see that many cows around here. They just see the olive trees and vineyards in our countryside, some goats, some sheep. But they don't really see that many houses. They wonder, where do you take those cows? Because it's called the Florentine steak but there's no cows. And actually that is true. But what they don't realize is that Tuscany is big region is actually the second biggest region of Italy. So it's very big. And those cows here, there's not enough space in Chianti or you know, in the countryside around Florence. It's very hilly. Something most people tell me that they don't realize how hilly it is. It's really about - all about rolling hills. So here there's no space for bringing up cows. So the cows are bred in a different part of Tuscany, which is called the Val di Chiana, and it's near Arezzo. It's more flat . It's still Tuscany, it's southern. So it's going towards the Val d'Orcia, which is another beautiful, beautiful area. We love to do it on our tours and experiences. And in that Val di Chiana. Valley - It means valley. So it's called the Chiana Valley and with a very spacious outdoor fields which are perfect for cows and the cows they live there. And then, of course, why it is called the Florentine Steak because the recipe, how it was cooked was invented in Florence. So that's why it is like a Florentine style steak from cows. The cows are called chiannina. The chiannina cows and they're called that way because they come from Val di Chiana. So they have a name which is related to where they are from. And the name of the steak comes from the recipe which was invented in Florence. So it can be confusing but, let's say then everything has its place.

[00:27:40.440] - Katy

Ah it's so interesting and it's a big steak too isn't it? It's not a little one.

[00:27:44.660] - Arianna

Those cows are huge, the cows are gorgeous. They're all white. They're very elegant. They are also used for, let's say, many religious processions and then also in Florence the The Scoppio del Carro for Easter. In every religious procession or events is usually opened by these beautiful cows with all the decoration on the face. They put a beautiful red decoration and flowers and everything, and then they let them walk. And that's the beginning of the procession or of the, let's say fiesta. So. They're very beautiful. They were used in the past as a working force because they're very strong. They have a very lean meat that it's not fat and they were used, they're very, very strong, they were used to have the farmers to work the soil. So they were used as tractors. So before the tractors, they had those cows. They are not used for milk. So something interesting about Tuscany's is that there's no cow milk here. There's plenty of cows, but we only use them for meat. And for, let's say for work. We love cheese and we have plenty of cheese in Tuscany, but it's all about goat and sheep cheese. For cow cheese you need to go either south or north. No, back here, this chiannina, this breed is only used for meat. And yeah it's very big, like the Florentine steak has to be at least one or two kilos or something. Yeah. Because otherwise otherwise it becomes tough because as I said, their meat is very lean. So if you cook it, if you have it too thin, then it becomes tough. To have it. It has to be a little rare inside. So that it melts in your mouth. That's the whole thing of the recipe. So it has to be thick and it has to be, let's say, juicy inside so that it to melt the best. It's one of the most delicious things on earth.

[00:29:51.020] - Katy

Oh, I do love a steak and I really do love my meat rare but I think people need to know if they're going to Florence, that this meat is - you do not order it well done. Because that's basically destroying it, from a taste perspective.

[00:30:07.460] - Arianna

Yeah

[00:30:09.740] - Katy

Well, that is definitely one experience you should have when you're in this area. What are some of the other experiences that people could have in Chianti?

[00:30:17.990] - Arianna

First of all, it depends on the season and we try on our experiences and enhance the most, the time of the year. Also when people can travel because every time of the year has some specialities. That's also something which differs countryside from the city. In the city, pretty much the same attractions are available all year round and pretty much to have the same kind of perspective except for festivals . In the countryside. It's all about seasonality. So the seasons are the very first thing which makes you experience one thing at that time, and then maybe you can come back and have a totally different experience. So if travellers are there

in the springtime, for example, of course, there's the so fresh cheese. So if you go, pecorino bar or to a goat's cheese bar, like the fresh cheese is incredible. And then there's the baby sheep and baby goats who are adorable and you can play with them and they run and they jump and they fall and then they stand up again. It's adorable. And also something special in the springtime is, honey, for example, here we have a big tradition of honey. Honey is produced all over the world, but let's say here in Italy, we do have such a big variety of flowers and honey is connected to the flowers. So in the springtime, it's beautiful because we can take a walk and see all the beautiful flowers and understand the different honeys according to the flowers blooming. So which is very interesting. Also the irises, for example, which gives the name Florence. It's a beautiful iris flower and they are blooming and there is so many traditions behind them. So they make perfumes and so many things are happening at that time of year. Of course, the hike's. So it's beautiful during the springtime and also to be able to see outdoors and to understand the whole nature which wakes up. So if there is so much to see - all the little sprouts and the flowers and understanding. So the picnics. It's about the joy to be outside again. Italians love to be outside. It's for us the very best feeling. So and then the artichokes, the asparagus. There is..

[00:32:35.630] - Arianna

The summertime is very beautiful as well. The summertime, has different colours. It's time for the wheat. So, you know, it's beautiful. We can walk and see these beautiful grains also in the Val D'Orcia. So you have all the grains and the wheats. Beautiful. The sunflowers, which are in bloom. The poppies, in between and late spring and early summer. The sunset. Sunsets in the summer time are incredible. So we get lots and just have these beautiful - we select places that have outdoor spaces where we can sit down and enjoy the view. Have some wine and enjoy the sunset then. Beautiful. Barbecues, of course, with the flying insects and other things. It's so beautiful on its own.

[00:33:28.700] - Arianna

Fall not even to mention it's like the most active and interesting time of the year. So from the great harvest, to the olive harvest, the, truffles, the colors which are changing from green, yellow to gold, and winter too actually. Winter, as we were actually talking right before starting this interview about how beautiful is Christmas. So, you know, this time of the year is also a very special time of year. The cooking classes in the home. Cozy. Those meals. Intimate meals in front of the fireplace. The Christmas decorations. So every time of the year is special and it's all about just going and coming back. That's the only way.

[00:34:11.090] - Katy

I know it's so exciting. I actually - I don't think I mentioned this to you, but I had a trip planned for March this year, which obviously did not happen. But we were actually spending a little bit of time in your area and I think it was about four days actually. So I was very much looking forward to it. And I don't care what season I come back in, I think, as you say, there's going to be something very special there for everyone. And some of the sort of.... people know Chianti for the one, obviously and it's a very famous region for wine, but what are some of the things that people might not know about the area?

[00:34:49.970] - Arianna

First of all, it's equal importance and production, in terms of equal amounts and importance, in the kitchen and also in the business in terms of like, surface of the land - the olive oil is equal to the wine. Of course, the wine is super famous, but olive oil is as important as wine in terms of everything. So in terms of the importance in the food and the culture and every single person here has some olive trees. And the olive harvest is one of the most important time of the year as well, together with the grape harvest. And then also, of course, the cheese I mentioned before the pecorino and the goat cheese, but also the artisans, something that I really was very important for me to include in the itineraries that we have created. It was also to give importance to those artists and artisans, because I think that the, what we call in Italian call territorio, what in French is Terroir. It is basically a complexity. It's not just about one aspect, but it's all about having the whole picture. And that makes you feel that you have really have a sense of the place you visited. And artisans are an extremely important part of this picture, because every single village here has its own tradition since centuries. For example, Impruneta there is the terracotta which adorn every single garden and even the Duomo Florence is all made by the terracotta tiles from Impruneta. So once you go there and once you understand, then you have a totally different appreciation and understanding of the whole Tuscan culture.

[00:36:31.790] - Arianna

And also, for example, you go to Colle di Val d'Elsa, there is crystal. And not many people know that, for example, in that tiny village of just a hundred people, it is producing 80% of the crystal in all of Italy and the 15% of crystal worldwide. So that's also a big, big production. And people may not know. The pottery as well. The wood-turning. There's so many. The basket weaving, for example, we have if people are interested, we introduced them to these almost last arts, like the basket weaving, which was at the beginning, it was the only way to carry grapes and olives in these baskets and they were making the baskets with their own hands. And still there are artisans which are making those things. So the textiles. Of course, when people think of Tuscany, they think of the wine. But there's so much more to this culture.

[00:37:32.020] - Katy

The wine's pretty good, too. I mean, like. Ha ha.

[00:37:36.500] - Arianna

It's always, of course, the protagonist. That we don't - I love wine and our cellar has plenty of producers of wine so of course wine is also the thing that is probably what most people connect when they are thinking of Chianti.

[00:37:53.630] - Katy

That's true. That's true. Now, because we spoke before, you are so close to Florence that it's possible to go on a day trip. It really occurred to me because I had done a day trip before that I really wanted to stay a bit longer and find out more. But it is possible to do a trip, isn't it?

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[00:38:10.390] - Arianna

Absolutely we do. We do 2 different kinds of experiences. One is a piece, let's say it's a piece of the countryside. So as we are so close. It is absolutely possible. So if somebody doesn't have enough time to spend more than one day in the countryside - so if somebody has just a few days in Florence but they want to experience something different, we can easily arrange a day trip. And we have so many different ideas and it can be customized and cater with the specific interests and needs of every single traveler. So we have so many activities from the more farm focus to the food focus, wine focus or you know, families with children, or we can customize and find the perfect activity for each single person. And it's very easy because it's very close. But then in addition to those day trips, is also possible to arrange longer experiences where we can let them stay for more days in those beautiful country homes and villas all around here in and Chianti and to arrange, every day, a different activity.

[00:39:20.680] - Katy

Mmm that does sound amazing. I really want to go back. Tell me how... I think our listeners are really keen to know how you are all going in this season. Have you managed to stay positive while you haven't been able to have visitors because I know that's a really important part of everything for you, not just as a business, but for your way of life.

[00:39:42.610] - Arianna

So we, of course, we have had a challenging year like for everyone else as well that is working in the tourist sector. We have been staying positive for several reasons. The very first reason is that we have had very loyal clients, who, instead of giving up, they are giving the strength. So it's them saying, "oh, don't give up!" And they are saying "it may not be in two months, but we are coming back and please stay alive" and they try to support us in all the ways they can. So what I see is that people do have the interest. People don't want to give up and they can't wait to get back. There's hope in the vaccine. There's hope in other ways to adapt and to try to find ways to be able to travel one day soon again. You know, of course keeping safe, but having the opportunity to start visiting places again. So there's this hope in the travelers, hope in the research. So things are going are going towards a good direction. So we are all waiting for some good news coming soon. Also, there was me, Alessio and I - it's been several months that we have been working on our new small little project, which is about creating these gift boxes. And we started just like that because we said, OK, let's try to find a way to stay connected. So to stay connected with the with all the producers here. Now that tourism is not happening right now and also all the restaurants are closed, so for them they are struggling a lot because, of course, they can send the wine to the - the wine, the olive oil, whatever is the product, but they can't sell it to neither to the travelers and nor to the restaurants. Also - so we said, OK, so let's try to find a way to support them and to stay connected for them. And also we the people all around the world and to keep their interest in Tuscany high and to give them a reason to stay connected. And that was the beginning of these gift boxes. We were talking about that before, right? Before the interview. We are blessed. It has been a wonderful response. We just closed our reservations for our Christmas Edition, which has been our very first addition ever. And it has been a great success. We are

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blessed and we still do not believe how people responded. And so we are definitely going to add some new editions, so more to come soon.

[00:42:17.980] - Katy

Excellent. Well, we can put all that information into our show notes, and I'm sure it's absolutely delicious because everything in Chianti region, everything is true, to the seasons, and it's all fresh and beautiful. Now, I've got one more question for you. Is there any favorite stories or customs that you have in Chianti that people might know about?

[00:42:40.720] - Arianna

One of the most fun things people may not know about our region and our area is our dialect. So you may know that the whole of Italy is famous for dialects. So Abruzzo has its own dialect. Sicily has its own dialect. Every single region has its own dialect. Which is basically another language. So if you don't know that language, you don't understand. Tuscany.. Alessio is always laughing at me because he said 'ah Tuscan people, you invented everything you had Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo. Everyone was born... Galileo Galilei. Every important scientist, poet, everyone was born here.'" And that also we have among some famous people who were born here. There's also Dante Alighieri, the one who wrote The Divine Comedy. So he basically he invented The Divine Comedy, he invented the Italian language, not the way it is today, of course, it has changed over the centuries. In the modern sense. Until that time, there was only the written language. People were only writing the the latin. With Dante Alighieri the Divine Comedy, finally he invented the vulgari which was the written Italian, which is, let's say, for everyone. So as he was born in Tuscany. In Tuscany, the only reason that it doesn't have it's own dialect. We speak only proper Italian. We don't have one. And this is the first thing that people, not hate, but let's say, of course, they don't like. We are the only ones with the proper, the proper words.

[00:44:24.990] - Arianna

You know, something funny that it's true - we don't have a dialect, so we speak Italian but we do have an accent, the Tuscan accent that is very, very particular and funny and we cannot pronounce the sound "ke". So if I want to order one CocaCola, I would order a 'hoha hola'. This is the Chianti, the Florentine accent. If I want to order Coca-Cola with a short straw. I would order a 'Hoha hola, hola annutsa hota hoota' [sic].

[00:45:04.860] - Katy

Oh that's brilliant. I love it.

[00:45:07.010] - Arianna

It is one of the most funniest challenges we have with our guests. Especially after a day or more we are together. Then when they make it traveling, we have lots of guests who decide, some guided - that to do a little part of the trip guided with us and then to keep traveling on their own, they go to Florence. They keep going - they go to Rome or to other regions. But when, especially when they go to Florence, or other parts of Tuscany or just outside Tuscany, they always laugh because they try to ask to go to a cafe and they are like "may I have a hoha

hola please"? And then they understand that they have been to Tuscany or that they have been living with a Tuscan. So.

[00:45:53.130] - Katy

That's brilliant. I love it. I love it. And you know I love Dante. I just, I have a thing. I go around looking for his statues wherever I go because he's got, he's always looking very serious. I do love him. Oh Arianna? Your part of the world just sounds so magical. If our listeners want to learn more about Chianti and perhaps join one of your amazing experiences when we can, how can they stay in touch with you?

[00:46:20.460] - Arianna

So you can, first of all, you can have a look at our website, which is www.kmzerotours.com. And then, of course, we are on Facebook and we are on Instagram as well. I try to keep it updated as often as I can. And we share maybe pictures and activities and projects and everything. And then, of course, they can always write me also at my email to get any information. And also they can register - there's a newsletter coming up.

[00:46:55.750] - Katy

Excellent. I hope you're going to be talking about the baby goats because I love baby goats. It's my thing. If there's one animal that I love, it's baby goats for some reason.

[00:47:07.560] - Arianna

Yeah - baby clothes are adorable and really they have lots of personality. They are so much fun.

[00:47:14.560] - Katy

Grazie Arianna and I can't wait to get back and come and meet you all in person and just explore Chianti myself. Thank you so much for sharing your beautiful part of the world with us here on Untold Italy today.

[00:47:27.480] - Arianna

Thank you so much. Thank you for having us. And I can't wait to have you all and to be able to have you all here. Grazie voi.

[00:47:36.920] - Katy

I hope you learned some more about beautiful Tuscany and the Chianti region today. As Arianna mentioned, it is so close to Florence that many visitors do dip in and out of there on a day trip. But don't you think spending a few days to soak up that atmosphere, discover the gorgeous villages and play with baby goats is a wonderful idea? Hopefully one day we can join Arianna around her table and eat a delicious boar ragu with a beautiful glass of wine as the sun sets over the Chianti hills. Sounds like bliss to me, if you want to stay in touch with the goings on in Chianti, then make sure to follow Arianna's company, .KM Zero Tours. Their gorgeous Instagram account is full of food, wine, beautiful countryside. And you know what, baby goats. Hee Hee. I really do love them! We put all the places mentioned plus links to KM

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Zero Tours website and their social media accounts on our website at untolditaly.com/57 for episode 57. That's all for this week. If you love this episode, why not share it with a friend who also loves Italy and can't wait to travel there as soon as we can. Also, don't forget, if you have a question you'd like answered on our upcoming podcast Q&A session, then send it through to ciao@untolditaly.com. Until then, it's Ciao for now.

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