

# Untold Italy Episode 60 - Garfagnana - My Tuscany With Buzz McCarthy

[00:00:00.060] - Katy

This is the Untold Italy travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 60.

[00:00:11.760] - Josie

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

[00:00:14.850] - Katy

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

[00:00:18.690] - 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.

[00:00:26.730] - 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.

[00:00:35.580] - Josie

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

[00:00:42.690] - Katy

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

[00:00:45.780] - Josie

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

[00:00:59.330] - Katy

Ciao Amici! I'm Katy and welcome to this week's Untold Italy episode, where we are taking another trip to Tuscany. If you had a recent episode about the Chianti region, then you know that Tuscany is a very big area and they're talking about it as a whole, really does it a little bit of a disservice. Tuscany stretches from Carrara (which is famous for marble) just below La Spezia and the Cinque Terre in Liguria in the north and to the seaside town of Ortobello in the south. In fact, Tuscany has a long stretch of coastline that is largely unknown by visitors from outside the European continent. But on this episode, we're taking to the hills. And while Tuscany's known for rolling green hills and hills towns, this time we are exploring the hills of

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north west Tuscany in the area known as Garfagnana, which is north of the charming city of Lucca, which I've talked about quite a bit on previous episodes.

[00:02:23.690] - Katy

The hills of this region are very different to those in Chianti and the Val D'Orcia but I'll let our guest tell you all about that. Buzz McCarthy is a world traveler, author and has a phd of psychoneurology. A fellow Melburnian, just like Josie and I, She's worked with Tony Robbins and created incredible events celebrating women around the world. But she also fell in love with this part of Italy and made it her home so she's here to tell us all about it today.

[00:02:29.150] - Katy

Benvenuta! Welcome to the Untold Italy podcast Buzz!

[00:02:29.630] - Buzz

Thank you. I'm delighted to be here on this rather foggy winter morning!

[00:02:36.500] - Katy

I love how we've got this sort of symbiotic relationship here. Buzz is originally from Melbourne, and so am I. But we have a very foggy evening here in Melbourne, even in the middle of summer. So Buzz - you've had so many incredible adventures around the world, but I'm intrigued. How did you end up living in Tuscany after having had such an exciting career in Australia and London?

[00:03:00.920] - Buzz

So I was first in Italy when I was 22, travelling, doing The Grand Tour, as one did with three Aussie mates and a car that kept breaking down. And when we finally got to Italy, which I already knew I loved and had always done like school projects on Italy. When we got to Italy and into Tuscany, I just went, oh my God, one day I'm going to buy a villa here. And my friends all were very sceptical. And it was almost like, pull the other leg, it's got bells on it. And I'm thinking quietly to myself, you know, not whom you speak to. So then one of my very close school friends, married an Italian man, and they were living in Florence. So for the next years, every couple of years, I would come to Europe on my six week 'can't not be in Europe for more than a couple of years' holiday. And I would go and stay with her in Florence and rekindle my love of this country and particularly in Tuscany. So dot, dot, dot, down the track, I said to my mother one day, this is what I'm going to do. And it was quite funny because she had had lunch with a friend of hers who was the mother of one of my school friends. And she said, Oh, Peggy, selling her apartment in Fontainebleau, in France would that interest you? And I said, No. Two things mum. One is that it's got to be Italy. And the second thing is you've got to die because I'm using your money to buy it!! I had a very good relationship with my mother, and she took it in in the manner in which it was delivered. (laughing)

[00:04:37.460] - Buzz

And then dot, dot, dot, my partner and I had decided to come to Italy and were thinking that maybe we'd look for somewhere to live. He was quite enthused by it as well. At that

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particular time, my mother was dying and I didn't know whether to cancel my trip. Her doctor called me into his office and said, "your mother's told me you've planned a trip to Italy. And I'm here to tell you that she wants you to go. So she thinks if she tells you, you won't. But I'm telling you that this is what her wishes are." So hummed and hard hummed and hard. And I thought, well, this might be Mum's last wish. Anyway, we decided to have the trip. So the morning that we were leaving, I spent in her hospital room. We were drinking tumblers of cognac and sharing - yeah, I know it was great - sharing the wonderful lives we'd shared as mother and daughter and how much we cared for each other and special moments. And, you know, I give thanks every day for the pleasure and the treasure that was. I walked out the door and she said, "now get on that plane and go buy your villa in Tuscany". So it seemed like it was meant to be. Prior to that, a couple of weeks before my partner had found an advert in the London Economist for villas in Tuscany. He tried to ring the guy a thousand time (this is before email) tried to ring the guy - he was never in his office. Finally, we got on to him and he said, yes, I'll send you the brochure of all the offerings. And my partner said, well, we're about to leave. So that's not going to get us. We arranged that he would send it to our hotel in Athens. We were going to fly to Athens, go and have some relaxed time on the Greek islands, during which time my mother actually did pass away. And by the time we got back to the hotel in Athens, we went to see the concierge and he had a stack of mail that was about two foot high. And he flipped through it one by one by one. We're looking, looking, looking. He got to the bottom of it. He said there's nothing here. And it must have been my mother, you know, from heaven, hell, wherever she was. But I pointed my finger at a particular envelope that didn't stand out from the other one hundred and ninety nine in any way, shape or form. And I said, what about that one? And that was the envelope with the brochure. I mean, unbelievable.

[00:07:10.940] - Katy  
Wow.

[00:07:10.940] - Buzz  
Yeah.

[00:07:12.290] - Katy  
I love this. All these coincidences. It's amazing. I love the universe.

[00:07:17.090] - Buzz  
Absolutely. So we went out to dinner. It was a very hot night in Athens and we had dinner in a cafe in the street and pouring over. "Oh, my God, that one looks fabulous". "Oh, no, no this one looks even better" "no, no, no", and so on and so forth and had a sleepless night and then flew into Florence the next day. Spent some time with my girlfriend there and then headed up to Lucca, where we made contact with the agent who had sent us the brochure. And it turned out that he was in Lucca at the same time. And so we spent a whole day with him driving around this area looking for houses. Now, we wanted to look at like 30 houses, but Nino was like, "oh, I think it's coffee time". We look at another house, we get barked at by a bunch of dogs, climb over a perilous bridge to look at another house. "Oh, I think it's

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lunchtime". Well, the Italians - the Italians don't like to do lunch in 20 minutes. We would have had a sandwich in the car and that wasn't it. So, yeah, look at another house. "Oh, I think it's time for ice creams". Along the way, we did see five houses, including the one that we bought, which is now my permanent home. So we didn't say yes on that day. I had to consult my girlfriend in Florence, of course, and she she'd restored a villa in Tuscany herself and knew everything. Eventually she said, "yeah, go for it, Buzz. Do it, and I'll be there to help you in any way, shape or form". Well, I think she probably regrets that to this day because she was a lawyer and our lawyer was useless and pathetic and didn't have an office and didn't have a mobile phone and didn't have anything. So in fact, she got involved in the process. And in fact, in the final signing of the deed, she realized that we had no actual access onto our land from the road and that she built in a right of way through the neighbor's property. And the neighbor was one of the seventeen people who were the vendors. It was a deceased estate. So she was able to negotiate that. Otherwise, we wouldn't have had an actual right of way from the street onto the property. So that was the beginning.

[00:09:36.380] - Buzz

Yeah. So nothing is straightforward in this country Katy, as you know, in buying houses?

[00:09:41.420] - Katy

Oh no.

[00:09:42.560] - Buzz

That's how we found this house. It then took a year for all those seventeen people to sign off on selling it to us and the minute they sold they sold it to us. We arrived here and had a month here looking at it - I mean, it was completely unliveable, but like a couple of good Aussies, we brought our sleeping bags and lilos and camped on the floor till we could buy a bed and everybody in the village welcomed us and we worked like the clappers to sort of clean it up and, and decide what to do with it. Then we found builders and tradespeople who we commissioned to in fact start with a roof which had like fifty holes in it. It had been abandoned for years, the house. And then it took another two years before we were able to come to a finished property. And that was thirty odd years ago.

[00:10:36.530] - Katy

Wow. You were a bit of a trailblazer then.

[00:10:39.290] - Buzz

Well, probably yeah.

[00:10:41.000] - Katy

Everyone's doing it these days.

[00:10:42.350] - Buzz

Well, yes. The other thing, the other thing that was difficult in those days was that there were no like real estate offices with with offerings in the windows. And of course, there was

no Internet to speak of that had all the offerings that you can now find, there was no listings on the on the Internet. It was very hard to buy property. And I think looking back these places, particularly in the rural part of Italy, they all had families of eight or nine children. And in two generations, the population of Italy went down to zero population growth. And it was one of the first countries in the world to actually declare ZPG, I think, back in the very early 70s. And so there were lots of houses which had formerly held large families which were just sitting there in the countryside and the remaining members of the family, who were probably three or four rather than eight or nine or ten, didn't really perceive that these places had any value. Why would somebody buy this place? We have no family to fill it anymore. Who would be interested? And particularly, why would a foreigner with no familial ties in this village be remotely interested in buying this huge pile of stone, which was a crumbling ruin and doing something with it? So it was very hard to find properties that were actually available.

[00:12:11.590] - Katy

But now it's your home and that's amazing. So can you tell us a little bit about the region that you're in, the part of Tuscany and why it's so special?

[00:12:19.900] - Buzz

So it's called the Garfagnana, and it's in the northern part of Tuscany. It starts probably 30 kilometers beyond Lucca. North of Lucca. Lucca is a beautiful town, a walled city, and I think one of Italy and particularly Tuscany's gems. The Garfagnana they also call the natural park of Tuscany. Now, a lot of people have a vision of Tuscany with rolling hills, which are quite bare in the summer with pencil pines, and that tends to be more the landscape of southern Tuscany, Sienna, Arezzo, those sorts of places around what we call Chianti-shire, which is where a lot of Brits have long-since owned properties and I think ruined that area because the prices are appalling. I mean, you pay five times as much for a beautiful meal down there than you would up here. But that's the sort of landscape that a lot of people equate with, Tuscany, not the sort of rolling hills, almost sort of semi alpine. Beyond me, there's a park of about fifty thousand hectares, which is just beautiful trees and used to have a small ski area in it. Now, we don't generally have that level of snow these days, although this year we did as I was saying to you earlier, Katy, we've just had the greatest snowfalls in thirty five years. And in fact, I was incarcerated in the house, willingly, looking out the window at snow falling for two weeks just after New Year. But that park is full of chestnut trees. And interestingly, in the war, this area was the Gothic line, which was the dividing line of the allies and the non allies was right through this area. And so it was very heavily impacted by the war. And in the last year of the war, the locals had no food. So all their animals had long since been killed. They'd had no men to plant their crops. They'd had no seeds to plant their crops. And in that last year of the war, the chestnut trees were more prolific than they ever had been. And the locals, who are a very hardy lot, stayed alive by chestnut meal three times a day, and they still love their chestnut trees. They have the chestnuts ground into flour and they love their chestnut cakes and all of that.

[00:14:46.510] - Buzz

When my son was at school here for a year when he was ten, we had Australia Day celebrations and I would I was besieged by him to take a lamingtons and all the teachers provided chestnut meal cakes and no prizes for guessing, which went first. So the traditions here are very ancient and I think it's still very much a time warp. And I think that's part of its attraction, its joy. A lot of the villages are very small. My village is only sixty one people. I'm the one. The rest are Italian. And as of this day last year, which I was reminded by Facebook, I am the only non EU citizen in the village following Brexit, which was formerly this time on the 1st of February last year. So the village is small, very traditional. They still use traditional equipment out there in the fields. You you'll say sickles and scythes going, although they do have modern tractors and so on and so forth. But you can wind your way up through the the path in this lovely wooded area beyond me, the National Park on a Sunday, and you might sometimes see a local man with a stall selling local cheeses by the side of the road or vegetables from his garden, things like that. They're very traditional in the way they eat. What you buy is what you eat, and it's from the next field or the next village. I have, in the past sometimes had Italians for meals and put together a recipe with Italian food with things like - years ago I made a pastor with melanzana, with eggplant, and they were shocked because they'd never had that combination. So things I mean, in the past, each region had its own pasta shape. That's changed, of course, with communication, but still their their cuisine and their/the way they use things and the ingredients are still very much very regional. And this is almost like a subregion. So as I said, a bit of a time warp. Each of the villages has its own range of festivals during the summer months, and you'll find some dedicated to the chestnut. Some will be dedicated to farro, which is a very ancient grain, which they love very much here and things like that. So it's not closed in terms of the people, but in terms of the practices of the way they live their lives. And I think in other places where you see, you go to a city or you go to 10 cities and you see the same shops in each city, it's very refreshing that everything is local and everything is different. And now there are a few supermarkets, but the individual food shops which sell the most extraordinary things, are still very much patronised by the locals because of the quality of the produce. It's not homogenized. It's not something you could buy in Lucca or Florence or Naples or Milan.

[00:17:56.570] - Katy

Amazing. Amazing. What are some of your favorite products that you can buy in your area?

[00:18:01.990] - Buzz

Well, again, I love the farro. That's very special. And I make a lovely salad with that with tomatoes and parsley and basil and shallots and lots of extra virgin olive oil. So that's that's lovely. Lucca and beyond is very famous for its olive oil. So I buy that. In fact, I went to a little bar on Saturday morning and she was offering olive oil for 15 euros a liter. And I said, could I taste some? And she proceeded to start cutting a slice of bread for me to taste it. And I said, no, no, no, I wanted it in a glass because I drink it. That's how I taste it. And she was quite shocked that a foreigner would do that. And anyway, it was beautiful and she sold it to me for ten fifty, although she'd offered it at 15 euros. So I had friends for lunch yesterday and we polished off a significant amount of that. So lots of lovely olive oils in this area. Salamis

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again, that because in this big national park above me is full of wild boar. My house is actually called the wild boars 'I Cinghiale'. And so there's a lot of wild boar products here. So salami is made with wild boar, sometimes lovely salamis with fennel seeds and then there's a little tiny little cheese factory literally within walking distance of my house, which makes very beautiful pecorino, which is one of the favorites of this region as well. They also make other cheeses. In fact, I've actually helped them make cheeses in that factory. I've actually worked in there just to get the feel of the place from time to time. But again, beautiful cheeses and the pecorino is either very fresh and quite soft and they have a cheese room where they keep it and it becomes more seasoned and more seasoned till it becomes almost like a strong cheddar. That's quite hard at the end. So there's some of the local products that you can get here.

[00:19:58.300] - Buzz

Of course, the breads are lovely, usually made without salt. I buy a kilo of bread for one euro thirty, which is fabulous. In Australia, for the same amount, I'd pay nine or ten dollars for a bread that was had the same quality is that. And of course the wine is lovely. I'm a bit high here for commercial grapes to be grown. A lot of the Italians grow it for their own consumption. But I can get wine from the local where I went to the bar on Saturday and tasted the olive oil. I go there and buy bulk wine, which comes from further south in Tuscany, and I buy that for about a euro sixty a litre. So you can't complain. You can live here incredibly cheaply.

[00:20:41.170] - Katy

Oh, it sounds amazing. Oh my goodness. When I was talking to Buzz earlier, I mentioned that I actually spent a little bit of time in this region and I did fall in love with it myself. Especially the terrain, as you mentioned, is so different with the chestnut trees. It's quite rugged, isn't it? It's like

[00:20:57.130] - Buzz

Yes, yeah, it's more of it's almost Alpine in some areas. And I think that was quite obvious with all the snow on it three weeks ago, with the whole area being covered by snow, it almost could have looked like a little bit of Austria.

[00:21:13.780] - Katy

So I can picture that in my head. But there was one place that I'd love you to tell a little bit more about. So I was telling Buzz earlier - that we went for this delicious lunch in the town the way she lives. And it's a gorgeous town and it's got a little medieval walled- town called Castelnuovo di Garfagnana. I think I've got it right. And yeah, we went to this - my kids and they were only little at the time, but they can remember the giant mortadella in this restaurant. But Buzz - Buzz is a bit famous there.

[00:21:43.900] - Buzz

So I, I used to run events here based in my villa and some of those were food events. So I used to bring an Australian cook over and we used to run a 12 day event for people interested in

food. I also used to run 10 day events which were empowering events for women. And apart from the sort of content of these events, we'd do food and we'd do shopping? So I used to take them for lunch at this place. It's called Il Vecchio Mulino - the Old Mill, and it's run by a very, very portly man called Andrea. And the girl behind the bar has been there for a thousand years as well. And she has this mortadella, which she told me once all those small goods are made in Bologna, that is Bologna's called la grass - the fat one, because it's the home of all those big salamis. A lot of the prosciutto is come from there. The areas around Ferrara are very much pork growing areas, and that's all in the Bologna region. So all those big products come from Bologna. But she did tell me it took seven people to carry it in. And as you would have seen it - it's placed on a cradle, a very large cradle, and that took seven men to bring it in and place it on that cradle. And it doesn't need refrigeration. And even in the summer months, she just would cover it with a gauze cloth on the side where she'd cut it. And she just gets a big knife and cuts. You know, it's almost like a car tire, isn't it? It's about as big as a car tire.

[00:23:19.690] - Katy  
It's huge!

[00:23:19.690] - Buzz  
And she just slices off these chunks and puts it on your piece of bread. Anyway, I used to take my people there and in some of the interviews I did in Australia with the Australian press about what I was doing in Tuscany, there was a photo taken of me with the mortadella and Andrea and they famously put that on their wall. So Katy, you obviously were more interested in looking at the food than the decoration on their wall, because otherwise you would have made my acquaintance then. Not now.

[00:23:56.200] - Katy  
Oh, I know! It's a - I think it's serendipitous that things have come full circle, but that's a really great place. What I really loved about that place is I just remember they gave you these like a wooden plates and then they would just bring out little bits of antipasti and like a cheese drizzled with honey and sausages and the farro salad, as you mentioned. I do recall that actually, now you mention it.

[00:24:23.770] - Buzz  
And as you mentioned, honey, one of the great joys of this area is the special honey that's made in the Garfagnana. It's quite renowned. It's really beautiful. So they have a way of pairing that with different cheeses. So they'll have honey flavoured with different trees or fragrances that they will pair with different local cheeses. And I'm sure that's what you got. The other thing that Andrea does, he brings out a dessert made by his mother. I don't know if she's still alive, but she used to called Torta Equisita. So the exquisite cake. And that was one of the specialties of Il Vecchio Mulino.



[00:25:02.730] - Katy

Ooooh

[00:25:03.160] - Buzz

But yeah, the food is amazing. And I think one of the things that differentiates this part of Tuscany from lots of others is that people are not out to fleece you and they'll keep bringing stuff and bringing stuff and and yet they'll sort of round down the bill or they won't charge you for this course or they'll - have another glass of wine. I mean, even my local pizzeria, I cannot walk out of that place without the owner bringing glasses of limoncello free and sometimes a glass of Prosecco to begin with. There are always surprises because they love to show that you their generosity and their hospitality. And then, you know, I remember taking a friend to lunch one day in a restaurant I'd never, ever been to. It was winter. And we were sort of moseying around and hungry. We found this restaurant. There were only four or five people in this vast place, which was probably full on a Sunday, and we had a meal, I think we just had a pasta and a glass of wine and some bread or a salad or whatever it was and whatever it was like - she rounded it down to 15 euros. But 15 euros for two people to have lunch with wine. I mean, I wasn't a repeat customer. I'd never been there before. I've never been back there into that area again. But that's the generosity of these people. They want you to be in their place. They share their whole hospitality and their warmth and their generosity with you. And that's what I love. The other thing about this place is there's a couple of places, including Il Vecchio Mulino and another one just out of Castelnuovo, which are very strong proponents of the slow food movement. And I think, again, when you look at cuisine in America, in Australia, in Britain, where it's like Fast and Furious and you don't have time to absorb the flavors and they don't have time to cook, to absorb the flavors, it's like throw it on a thing and put it out to them and then you get the next customers in. And I remember the millennium 1999 to 2000 when I was here with my husband and my son and we booked to go to dinner in this other place called Il Pozzo, and there would have been about 200 people in this restaurant on the ground floor. And then on the upper level, there was live music on both floors. We had a 10 course meal and everything was just brought out slowly and gently with this one accompanying that and that one accompanying this. And Maurizio, who's the owner of that, is very much a proponent of the slow food movement. So to think you could dash in there and have a quick meal and come out is unthinkable. And yet you can go and have a beautiful lunch for two people with two courses. And let me tell you, his antipasto platter would contain 17 items. I've had it a thousand times some hot some cold. You would have that and a pasta dish and some wine, and it would be under 40 euros for two people. I mean, unthinkable value. That's amazing. And beautiful food. Everything's local. They source things locally because they give it locally and they want to source it locally. And it's like put back the money into your local community. And I, I like that. Like even building this house. And then later when I put in a swimming pool, I only wanted to employ local people. I wanted all the money to stay in this valley.

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[00:28:33.470] - Katy

Yeah. I mean, generosity begets generosity, doesn't it? I totally think so.

[00:28:39.020] - Buzz

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And I know. I think that's why this area is so special. People care for one another. My immediate neighbour who's feet away. But at the back of my house, I look out at a 10th century fortress on the other view. I've actually got the best view of the village. But don't tell anyone else that. My neighbour behind passed away a few years ago. But she was 106 and a half.

[00:29:05.000] - Katy

Wow.

[00:29:05.600] - Buzz

Now this is about community. This is about good food. She'd lived here through that war where they'd had no food. She would have had that chestnut flower meal three times a day in 1944 for a whole year. She was 106 and a half. Community. People caring. Local food. No pesticides. No putting in cold storage, you know. Pick it up from your garden and buy it from the local market, eat it. It's fresh flavoursome. Local wine, you know, and caring from the community. There's something very special about that. That's why I'm very happy living here.

[00:29:40.670] - Katy

Oh, it sounds amazing Buzz. Now you talk about the slow food movement, and actually I'm a massive fan of that movement myself and have been lucky to go to a few events actually in Lombardy around there. But do they have special festivals for slow food in your part of the world?

[00:29:58.760] - Buzz

No, not that I've ever noticed. They have them in other parts of the world, but not particularly up here. You just know that there are a few places who are very much committed to the slow food movement, but I think we're a bit off the beaten track for that. And I think certainly other areas Emilia-Romagna, Lombardia, probably more conducive to greater crowds attending such events.

[00:30:22.010] - Katy

Yeah, it is very an Italian tradition, and that's where the movement started. I think it's been adopted by some places in America now. But yeah, it's definitely an Italian story and I think it probably evolves from the tradition of the sagre maybe as well. You know, those food festivals perhaps. I don't know. But you mentioned the ones about chestnuts before. Do they happen every year?

[00:30:46.100] - Buzz

So every summer, every village will have a series of events which relate to food. So there'll be chestnut or there'll be farro or there will be porchetta, you know, the lovely roast pork on

the spit or there'll be mortadella and salami and whatever. It's like any excuse to get together and eat. I did go to one festival a few years ago and which was actually there were 10 courses and you got ten tickets and you had to go to a different stand for each. And in fact, those stands actually went into the next village. So you had to walk along the way. They gave you a little bag to hang around your neck, to put your glass in so you could put your glass there while you were eating and or walking. And there were ten courses of farro from savory to sort of dessert.

[00:31:37.280] - Katy

Amazing. Amazing. I love these. It reminds me of the progressive dinners my parents used to have.

[00:31:44.150] - Buzz

Absolutely.

[00:31:45.810] - Katy

But maybe a little bit more refined.

[00:31:47.720] - Buzz

And all on foot Yeah, they're really fun.

[00:31:52.860] - Katy

I love it. I love it. Now, you mentioned as well that you're very close to Lucca. And Lucca is one of my favorite favorite cities in Italy. And it's just so special, isn't it? Like, I don't understand why more people don't go there, actually, because it's so easy to get to lots of different places from there, including your beautiful part of the world. Is there something that you really love about Lucca that you think is really special?

[00:32:17.600] - Buzz

Well, the thing I like about Lucca is that not everybody knows about it. It's like hush-shush. When we first used to come here, you would never see a tour group with a guide and an umbrella. You would never see that 30 years ago. Now you do, but not anywhere near the proliferation of other places like Florence. We used to say to people, there's this wonderful walled city nearby. They built these fabulous fortifications, but they were never invaded. So the walls are intact and you can walk all the way around them. But we're not going to tell you any more about it because we want to keep it as a local secret. Anyway, now, of course, people have discovered, Lucca, you can walk or cycle around the walls. It's about four kilometers. You can look into people's gardens. There's the botanical gardens you can look into as well. It's a city of, I have read, 76 churches. Some of them are beautiful. Many are hidden down a little street. So I've never actually been into, but some of them are quite big. There's a cathedral there. There's another beautiful church San Frediano, which has a beautiful mosaic facade. And there's another one San Michele, in a square of the same name, which has lovely pillars up towards the top of it. And they're all made of different coloured marble. So very spectacular. So Lucca is, if I say largely undiscovered, it is largely

undiscovered, although there are people now discovering it and there are tourists there in the summer months- not now. It has a wonderful antique market, the first, no third weekend of every month, which is fantastic. It's almost as good and as big as Arezzo, which I think is the largest antique market in Italy. They have food fairs as well. They have a big comics festival, which doesn't interest me in the slightest in about October, but it brings in enormous revenue and enormous numbers of people. There's a Lucca summer festival every year. Last year, unfortunately, got canceled. Paul McCartney was going to be singing. Elton John is often singing there. Celine Dion is billed for the next one. So it's a very big summer festival. I saw Leonard Cohen there. Amazing. As an Aussie, you would know Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. I saw them perform there at one of the Lucca summer festivals. So it does have a lot in its favor. Again, the food is lovely to sort of typical Luccese food, using wild boar, using the local cheeses and so forth - they're very proud of. Polenta, things like that. The close proximity to Pisa airport. It's, you know, twenty minutes on the train. It's not much further to Viareggio and the coast, that lovely Versilia coast of Viareggio. Forte dei Marmi, which is a very upmarket, fashionable resort favoured by a lot of the industrial north, the wealthy people from Milan and Cremona and so forth, and others. Beautiful, wonderful place to go to, particularly in the summer when they have a fantastic market on a Sunday. But Lucca, yeah, it's contained within those walls. So it's like when people say to me, so what are your recommendations for Lucca? And I just say, get lost. What I mean is just go walking because you can't really get lost. You'll find your way out of the maze at some point and you'll go, "Oh, yes, I've been here before, I know that place". So it's a place to just walk and wander and discover little alleyways, fabulous restaurants. There's a Roman amphitheater, which is very spectacular and now has for me, unfortunately, is filled with restaurants in the summer when you can see that without anything in it, you see the lovely circular amphitheater with people living in the houses, looking on to it, a spectacular piece of the city that that is quite unusual to have a Roman amphitheater. But yeah, there's a lot. There's very good fashion there.

[00:36:29.140] - Katy

And they've got Puccini as well, haven't they? Puccini was born there. There's a Puccini museum here, which is lovely. A house where he lived. And there's a Puccini festival here every year. And there's a couple of churches where they have lots of music festivals and on a constant basis. So a lot of activity. There's a few other museums, including the museum of, I don't know, horror or something like that, which I wouldn't bother going to. But part of the joy of Lucca is just to walk, to eat and drink and look at the people and, you know, and as I said, get lost.

[00:37:05.530] - Katy

I love it. We actually went to a Puccini concert there in one of the churches. And I've got to say, even if you don't like opera, if you ever make it to Lucca, you should definitely do that because it's like one hour. And I think they strategically time it between aperitivo and dinner and you go there and they just do the hits and the highlights of Puccini and then you can just go off to your dinner. But like the beautiful arias and this stunning city. I can't talk highly enough about that. I just thought it was an amazing experience.

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[00:37:34.840] - Buzz

There's also a big Pucchini festival down at torre del Lago, which is down towards Pisa on the coast, which I've never been to. But that's again an annual late summer event and apparently quite spectacular.

[00:37:47.830] - Katy

Oh, gorgeous. And there's so many like cute little towns and things around that area as well. We've already mentioned Castelnuovo, but there's an amazing bridge close by isn't there? That's particularly beautiful.

[00:38:03.220] - Buzz

Yes, it's called the Ponte della Maddalena, but more commonly known as the Devil's Bridge. So it has five archways, all of different sizes, and it's quite a steep climb to the top. And then you go down to the other side. But all these archways are of different sizes. And the sort of local law is the devil got cross the night it was built. And so he built it like that. But that leads across from the road that goes up my side of the valley to the other side of the valley where there's a lovely town called Barga. Now, Barga is very interesting town as well. It has a lot of people from Barga went to Scotland after the war. A lot of people from my area went to Australia. They all went to Perth or to America or Argentina. But from that particular town of Barga, they went to Scotland. And so it is not uncommon to hear Scottish accent still in Barga, there's still a link between the two cities. It's a very artistic town. They have a jazz festival in the summer. There are a lot of art studios there. So there's a lot of working artists who go and paint and so forth in that area. And there's a little opera house. I remember walking into the Opera House once a few years ago because I heard singing. I was just on a day trip there. We were just wandering around and we sort of snuck in the back and there was a conductor that he was conducting auditions, for casts for the operas that summer. And we snuck in and sat at the back. And one by one, the people who were there were auditioned. And then he looked around to us and said, any more? Well, no! At that point we fled. So that's a gorgeous little town. Again, on a hilltop on the top of the hill is a beautiful 17th century church of Saint Christopher made entirely of marble. And the windows are alabaster. So beautiful, a beautiful sort of almost orangey light comes in through that church. It's quite beautiful.

[00:40:13.130] - Katy

Oh, it sounds lovely. It really sounds lovely. And Italy is very seasonal and it changes with the seasons. You mentioned that you've been snowed in this year, which did actually sound quite exciting given your stash of wine and delicious foods there. But how does the rhythm of the seasons change the area?

[00:40:33.550] - Buzz

I think, you know, when we... living in Australia, we don't really have four seasons. You know, they've all changed. And even in Britain, where you and I have both lived, you almost don't have four seasons as well. But here you're very conscious of the seasons. And I think. There's a number of reasons for that, so in the shops in Australia, in America, in Britain, you can buy

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food from anywhere in the world at any time of the year. Here I go to the shops. If I'm having people for lunch or dinner, I don't really plan my menu. Particularly, I go into the shop and go, "Oh, that looks nice. I'll use that". And so you know that what's in the shops is seasonal and fresh so that it hasn't been in a cool store. That's why when people talk about how magnificent Italian food tastes, it's for that very reason. It is seasonal and it's fresh and it hasn't been stored in a cool store or pumped with gas to enable to be put on a supermarket shelf. That's the beauty of shopping in local markets where things are sourced from farmers. So that's one of the differences. Another of the differences is watching the farmers work. So I have a working farm next to me. And the guy who owns that, who was one of the well, his father was one of the 17 vendors of my house. It was a deceased estate. He was one of them. Has the biggest, biggest vegetable garden I've ever seen, which is just adjacent to where I park my car above the house. And I used to plant my veggie garden, you know, late April, beginning of May. And sometimes my things would die before they even came through the Earth, or sometimes they would be quite pathetic. And then I realised that I'd had my things in the ground, sometimes for six weeks before Gianluca had his in the ground. And I thought, ah, took a while to catch on. I need to plant when I see him planting and I would see his things absolutely flourish and mine would be dead on the bloody vine, you know. So now I plant when he plants so watching them. So obviously this winter they've had a lot of work to do when the snows weren't on the ground, which has really only been in the last ten days. They've been out there repairing fences and cutting down trees and so forth that have been damaged with the snowfalls. So they've had tractors out. But normally I don't see them during the winter. They're inside. I have no idea what they do, but they're probably making produce and things like that. But the minute the spring happens, they're out on their tractors from 6am till 10:00 at night, planting, doing things, working on the farm. So you see that whole difference in how they live their lives. Things are also seasonal by the virtue of what is available for the hunting season. So there are three different hunting seasons. Again, that's very seasonal. So in the very beginning of the hunting season, they're allowed to go out and shoot small things like pheasants and so forth, and then they're allowed to maybe start catching fish. And then at the very end of the hunting season, they're allowed to shoot the boar. Now, obviously, in the beginning of the season, the baby boar are just baby baby boor. And so A - it's too dangerous to be out there anywhere near the mothers who are very ferocious. And obviously, you want the boar to have at least a summer to grow up. The hunting season, actually, for boar actually finished yesterday, the last day of January. And so they were gunshots. I was very conscious of gunshots all weekend where they would have been out and everywhere there were - when I went out on Saturday - everywhere, groups of men with orange baseball caps, which is, you know, the hunters used to kill each other sort of randomly by you know by accident because they never really had any sort of defined clothing or sort of safety mechanisms. Now, it tends to be that they wear sort of army fatigues and orange baseball caps. So Saturday, I saw a lot of orange baseball caps around, and Saturday and Sunday I heard lots of shots. So, again, that's a very seasonal thing. You get some fresh trout in the in the season where they're allowed because they have to be licensed to do all this fresh trout, very prolific in the beginning of the season when when they were allowed to catch the trout and then obviously the wild boar, you see them up in the hills and here their shots in the in the season for that. So you do see and then, of course, in the summer, the

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season or all the festivals, they all go very late because we have very long days and long evenings. Often it's like still 10-ish or later. So so yeah. So you do see you do actually feel the change of seasons, which is nice. And in the winter, when you know, I've got a fire on and whatever. You smell lovely smoke outside, everybody's got their big fires on, you know, it's quite nice to sort of hibernate a bit and do life differently, and I think that's one of the joys of living here as well.

[00:46:03.480] - Katy

Oh, my goodness. Sounds divine, so what about the foliage? Does it - do the leaves change on those chestnut trees? Or are they evergreen?

[00:46:11.620] - Buzz

No, the leaves change. Often the brown leaves just stay on until the new green ones come and shoot in the following spring. But it's interesting because you can see buildings in the winter that you've never seen before because it's so dense, the foliage that you don't see anything until the winter. And then there's, you know, eventually they fall off. Of course.

[00:46:36.090] - Katy

Oh, my goodness. I can't wait to go back. It's giving me chills. I had such a great time when I was there. Now, I do have one last question for you? Because I know you love Italy and you love your region where you live. But have there been other regions of Italy that have stolen your heart?

[00:46:52.320] - Buzz

Oh, now, that's a very poignant question. So during this covid lockdown, I saw a picture on the internet of the facade of a house further south in the province of Abruzzo. Now, I know nothing about Abruzzo. I have never been there. All I know is that part of it's on the Adriatic coast. And if you drive from my place to Abruzzo, you head to the northern outskirts of Rome and turn left. That's all I knew of Abruzzo. But I looked at the facade of that house and it stole my heart and I said, I have to have that house. So what happened was I made contact with the agent who sent me a video in the cellar where there is no light. So it was completely black and I could see absolutely nothing but listening to her rabbiting on, which was beyond useless. She sent me a few. I know I have seriously the quality of real estate agents in this country, you would not believe! That's why you need a go-between, you know, someone like Nikki Taylor, a go-between. So anyway, long story short, my son was here at the time. We packed a sandwich and our toothbrushes and we drove 700 kilometers down to look at this house. I knew the town it was in. I didn't know the address. We found it. I put my hand on the door knocker and I said, You are mine. The next morning we inspected the house, which was a deceased estate with not 17 but 11 owners. So it didn't take quite as long. But in the couple of days that we spent there, my son and I both fell in love with Abruzzo, a very different region from Italy. We love the nature parks there. It's very rugged, there's skiing resort. There's lots of beautiful parks. There's wonderful beaches, lovely woodlands and nature, quite undiscovered, I think, by international tourists. In talking to people, they said it got a lot of visitors from Italian tourists, but not from international visitors. We love the way that people

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were so friendly to us. We were walking through a little town one morning to have a coffee and there was a priest lolling against a wall on his mobile phone and he took the phone away from his ear and bade us good morning. You know, it's like, in lots of parts of the world in a million years, that wouldn't happen any more. So we felt the generosity of spirit of this area and and loved it. Again, very regional food. The salamis were much spicier, a lot more chili in things. Pizzas, again, different. So again, illustrating the differences between regions and the regional differences of what's available. And of course, being on the sea, there was fish available as well. So that house stole my heart and I came back to Tuscany and mulled over it thinking, well, if I buy this, it means I'm never going to live in Australia again because I don't have enough money to buy 25 houses. And look, it was really not a difficult decision. My heart is in this land. I have always felt European. And so I've set in motion the purchase process, which was fraught with hassles, agents who told lies, blah blah blah. I had a survey done by an engineer of the house, so I knew all the foibles. I knew what needed to be done. I knew sort of how much needed to be spent on that house. It's a five story house built in the 1880s for a noble man, so beautifully proportioned ceilings. 14 and half foot tall. Lovely rooms. Beautiful views and, yeah, it's mine.

[00:51:05.840] - Katy

Oh. I'm liking this.

[00:51:08.130] - Buzz

And so it's not a renovation. It is a full-blown restoration and contracts are being signed as we speak for the work to be done. So that will start very shortly. And then I will have another region of Italy to fall in love with.

[00:51:25.470] - Katy

We'll have to have you back on to tell us about Abruzzo!

[00:51:27.960] - Buzz

So I have a Facebook page, if anyone is interested. It's called the Noble House Abruzzo. And I've got, in just a very short time because I've only just bought it. I've got 485, I think people who have liked my page and are following it and I'm gradually telling the story of the hassles, the lies, the deceit, the joys, the waiting for documents, the story of the purchase. And I think I'll probably end up writing that into a book. But people are very much enjoying the sort of the story as it goes along.

[00:52:06.990] - Katy

That sounds like fun. I'm going to get onto that. Do you have any other ways people can stay in touch with you?

[00:52:11.850] - Buzz

On Instagram? I'm Tuscan Village Life and I post lots of photos of particularly Tuscany, my region and the joys of the food here and the views and so forth. So that's my main outlet for Tuscany. I don't have an Abruzzo Instagram page yet, just the Facebook page. I also have a

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restored barn, which I think I sent you a short video film that my son just made for me, and it was a barn full of old iron beds and hay and timber and junk and rubbish and saddles made from wood and hay, which would have been incredibly uncomfortable and rubbish. And it is the most divine living space now. It's like a New York loft, really. It's sort of quasi modern, very different from the flavour of my villa. But I rent that out so people might be interested in finding that. Oh, where can we find that one? My website is Tuscan Villa Rental dot com.

[00:53:18.400] - Katy

Yeah. And on that page, actually, Buzz has got lots and lots of things to do and see in the beautiful Garfagnana region, which as I mentioned, I really fell under the spell of several years ago. And really thank you so much for bringing those memories back to life for me. I really hope other people have the chance to go and explore this area of Tuscany because they will be entranced, I'm sure.

[00:53:41.880] - Buzz

Oh, thank you, Katy. And should you get up this place any time, I'd love to have you to stay and share my table with you. I had people for lunch yesterday. It was the first time I've had guests at my table for six months because of this wretched word that we don't we agreed not to speak about yesterday, but we had a bountiful lunch full of good humor and good food and 4 Aussies together, expounding the virtues of what we love about this beautiful country.

[00:54:14.380] - Katy

Oh, I'll take you up on that, actually, and then I'll shout you lunch down at the big mortadella place.

[00:54:19.860] - Buzz

Sounds perfect. I hope your listeners have enjoyed this podcast and feel encouraged to come back to Italy, come and see this beautiful part of the world that is still largely undiscovered by foreigners and has lots of lovely, unique character and flavor about it.

[00:54:39.570] - Katy

Oh, it really does. Thank you so much.

[00:54:43.350] - Katy

Are you intrigued to delve deeper into Tuscany, having spent a week in Buzz's part of the world? I can honestly tell you it is just magical. One night we went for a walk to get gelato. As you do. And as we wandered back up the path to our villa, we noticed twinkling lights in the gardens. I said to my husband, "oh do you think they're very lights?" And then we both realized they were fireflies. I'd never seen fireflies before and it was just so enchanting. It may have been that night when we discovered what we think was the best pistachio gelato we've ever tasted. Who knows. But I'm sure the romantic atmosphere made it taste even better. As Buzz mentioned, she has a gorgeous converted barn that is available for rent. I put a video that gives you a walk through of the accommodation into the show notes at

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untolditaly.com/6- for, episode 60, as well as the details of her exciting renovation in Abruzzo and of course, the places and restaurants she mentioned.

[00:55:43.380] - Katy

Thank you so much. Grazie Mille for listening to our show. Make sure you hit the subscribe button so you don't miss an episode. We've got some great guests coming up in the coming weeks that will take you the length and breadth of Italy. But for today, it's Ciao for now.

[00:56:01.560] - Katy

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