

Untold Italy Episode 64 - Stunning South Tyrol & The Dolomites

[00:00:00.150] - Katy

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 64.

[00:00:11.950] - Josie

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

[00:00:15.040] - Katy

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

[00:00:18.850] - 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.

[00:00:26.900] - Katy

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[00:00:35.770] - Josie

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

[00:00:42.850] - Katy

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[00:00:45.940] - Josie

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

[00:00:59.790] - Katy

Ciao Tutti! Hi everyone! This is Katy, your host, with a very exciting show today since we started the Untold Italy podcast, our online community and website, there have been a few lesser known regions and areas that people are often asking about, and they are at opposite ends of the country. One is in Puglia in the south, known for beaches, coastline and ancient traditions. Now we spoke about Puglia on episode 46 and we will return there again. But the other one is South Tyrol and the Dolomites area where we are visiting today, the Dolomites are some of the most spectacular mountain peaks in the world. They are very well known in Europe and our popular hiking and skiing destinations for Europeans. But they are relatively unknown outside of the continent. They cross a few regions, including beautiful South Tyrol

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nestled on the border with Austria, which soaks up both Italian and Austrian traditions and customs. Now, unfortunately, I haven't been there yet, but it is definitely on my list and was included in our ill-fated 2020 itinerary. So when planning that trip and doing my research, I came across a wonderful website called Throne and Vine, which had amazing tips and ideas for visiting South Tyrol and the Dolomites. Now, if you've been looking into that area, there's not too much information available online in English. So I found myself going back there again and again as I refined our trip. So naturally, I reached out to the owners of Throne and Vine for this episode of the podcast. Americans Kate and Vin were smitten as soon as they set foot in South Tyrol and they vowed to return every year and uncover all of its secrets. So without further ado, I'll welcome them onto the show to tell you all about wonderful South Tyrol and the soaring Dolomites.

[00:02:52.900] - Katy

Benvenuti, welcome onto the Untold Italy Travel podcast, Kate and Vin.

[00:02:58.570] - Vin

Hi there.

[00:02:59.390] - Kate

Thank you for having us. Hi.

[00:03:01.640] - Katy

Hi. I have to say, Kate, and Vin that the Dolomites and the South Tyrol area have been one of the most requested destinations on our podcast. So we are very excited to have you join us today. Before we start to delve deep into the region, though, what's your story and how did you fall in love with this really unique part of Italy?

[00:03:21.520] - Vin

Well, we were on our first trip to Italy back in 2014 - we had planned to do in Northern Italy tour, and so we were going to go to Venice and Verona and the last minute we decided to take a little side tour to South Tyrol. We saw a picture of a town called Murano and it just looked beautiful. And we thought, let's just rent a car and drive up there for a couple of days. And when we arrived, it literally felt like home. We wanted to cancel the rest of the trip and skip Verona and just stay in Murano. We didn't do that, but we did go to Verona and it was beautiful. But we came back the next year explored more of South Tyrol. Spent our entire time in the region. And each year since then we've gone back. And a couple of years after our first visit, we decided to launch Throne and Vine because after talking to family and friends, we realized that a lot of them had no idea where South Tyrol was or that it was even a part of Italy. So we decided to share our passion through the website.

[00:04:25.410] - Katy

Oh, it's great, it's such a wonderful website. I mentioned to Katie and Vin earlier that I used it to do some research for my own trip, but I had to change that around. And we'll explain a

little bit more about that in a minute. But Kate maybe you can tell us what is so special about South Tyrol. What's the landscape like?

[00:04:43.620] - Kate

It's a wonderful blend of contrasts. You get a little bit of alpine, a little bit of Mediterranean. So there's a little bit of something for everybody there. But because of where it's positioned in the northern part of Italy and how it used to be part of Austria, it ends up being this huge blend of contrast between German, Austrian, Italian, which really creates a wonderful environment for everybody who's interested.

[00:05:09.300] - Vin

We've always told friends that if you are trying to decide between going to Germany and Italy, go to South Tyrol, you'll get a chance to experience it in one trip.

[00:05:19.770] - Katy

Yeah, it's amazing mix of culture. And you also have these huge, amazing mountains and incredible peaks and the beautiful turquoise lakes. I think they're very famous on Instagram. And some people, when they look at them, like you said, they might think they're in Austria or Germany or even Switzerland, but they're actually in Italy.

[00:05:38.100] - Vin

Right, right.

[00:05:39.150] - Kate

Yeah, that's exactly right. Yeah.

[00:05:41.670] - Katy

So do you have some favorite mountain ranges? Because it's actually like I think it's hundreds of mountains there.

[00:05:47.700] - Vin

Yeah, there's over three hundred mountain peaks in the region. And I think that Dolomites themselves are comprised of about twenty six ranges just alone. And of course then you have the Italian Alps more towards the north. My favorite place to go hiking is called Alpe di Siusi. It's the Europe's largest alpine pasture and it's just an amazing landscape. Once you arrive to the top of the plateau and you look over and you see the peaks of the Dolomites, it literally will take away your breath and hiking up there is just wonderful because it's not strenuous. Pretty much anyone can do it that is capable of walking and you can walk from mountain hut to mountain hut and you can stop and have a beer or have a meal. There's really nothing like it for us in the United States that I can compare it to. But yeah, that's that's my favorite place to go hiking in the Dolomites.

[00:06:40.290] - Kate

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Mine is probably the same, actually. Yeah. We have a friend named Volter who lives up there and has his own farm hut. And then he's got his his alpacas and his chickens and his goats that he has to chase around the mountain. So it's very fun it's a very cool environment to be in and to just see those jagged peaks of the Dolomites with looking like teeth jutting out of the earth. It's just an incredible spot.

[00:07:06.120] - Vin

Yeah, I would say. And one of the coolest things about the Dolomites that are really unlike anywhere else in the world is there are mountains that you can experience from almost a 360 degree standpoint, and that the way they come out of the ground, they're almost like giant works of art. And you can hike all the way around them and then they look entirely different. So you could spend your morning looking at the mountain from one viewpoint and then the afternoon and the other, and you'll look like an entirely different mountain. So pretty amazing.

[00:07:32.400] - Katy

Goodness, I'm pretty taken by the lakes as well. So, I mean, they are just sort of like an otherworldly color, aren't they.

[00:07:41.520] - Vin

Oh yeah. Lago di Braies is probably the most photographed lake in the world. If you've spent any time on Instagram, I'm sure you've seen it. But that is absolutely stunning. The turquoise color of the water, it's literally when you look in the pictures, you think, oh, it can't really be like that. But when you show up, it is. And that's an amazing place to visit because there's a loop trail that goes all the way around Lago di Braies, so you could spend a good half day there just exploring. And then, of course, you can see the lake from every side.

[00:08:14.280] - Katy

Beautiful. How long does it take to walk around the lake? That's about two hours, so not very long. We always tell people that if you're going to go to Lago di Braies, go very early. It's such a popular destination. Most people, they go to the Dolomites - it's probably, I would say, in their top three spots to go visit. So we recommend getting there at the crack of dawn if you really want to enjoy it without a swarm of tourists.

[00:08:39.210] - Katy

OK, I've heard it's very popular with the Instagram influences as well. So you don't want to get in their shots.

[00:08:46.080] - Vin

You might see some models walking around, but that's all right.

[00:08:52.050] - Katy

You know, normally what I find in Italy is that you might have these really popular place that people are always going to, but it might be something that's maybe easy to get to. It might be

something a lake that's just as special, but maybe just a little bit off the path that people maybe don't know about because it's not been blasted all over Instagram.

[00:09:11.520] - Vin
Right.

[00:09:12.120] - Kate
I think one of our favorite ones is Lake Carezza, and that is very similar to Lago di Braies, but it's less well known. And we even went there, I think, one time around Christmas time. And they have the Krampus where they wear the masks and they have the horns and they chase you around as part of the Christmas market, so it's it's a very all year round destination that you can check out too even when it doesn't have the emerald to listen to it, it still is a fabulous spot to check out.

[00:09:43.970] - Katy
Hmmm - Lake Carezza. Writing that one down. That one - that sounds like a good one. I always like to try and find those little hidden gems all over because I think things are popular for a reason. But they also have a tendency to be overpopulated these days, unfortunately.

[00:10:01.670] - Vin
Oh, absolutely. Yeah. And I would say my favorite place to go hiking is actually around Murano. So not in the Dolomites, but more in the Alps. And they have - I don't even know how many dozens of trails called Waalweg, which basically translates to ancient water channel. And these run all over the mountains and you can walk next to these, basically, it's a flowing stream. You can walk all over the mountain ranges, down into the valleys, and you walk through vineyards, orchards right up to castles and churches. It's amazing. And I think that's something that we arrived we had no idea those even existed and would strongly recommend it. Now, a lot of people go there for the Dolomites, but also go hike the Alps because it's just astounding.

[00:10:49.580] - Katy
Wow. So tell us a little about the castles then. I love castles. Germany's really famous the castles. France has the châteaux, but somehow Italy doesn't get a good mention. But I think they've got some pretty nice ones there.

[00:11:02.750] - Kate
They do. Yeah. And I think they have this region has around 800. So it's definitely like lacking.

[00:11:09.950] - Vin
More castles than anywhere else in Europe, apparently.

[00:11:12.740] - Katy
Is that right. Oh my goodness.

[00:11:14.750] - Vin

And that's largely because back in the Middle Ages, South Tyrol was kind of a bridge between northern and southern Italy. And so people passing through between the region. And so there was a lot of castles put up on the mountainsides. And when you drive into South Tyrol for the first time, you can't miss them. They jut from the mountain and they just capture your attention and you immediately want to go hike up to them. They're amazing.

[00:11:39.860] - Kate

Oh, one of them actually, it's called Katzensungen and it has the world's oldest grapevine. So you can go check out that out. They call her the old lady. So that's kind of a neat spot to check out as well.

[00:11:54.050] - Katy

But I mean, it kind of does make sense because if you think about, you know, you probably have people coming from Austria coming over to raid into this area. Not that it was really Austria or Italy back then, but you'd like that will probably marauding tribes, gangs with Tomahawks or something. And so what sort of style are they? They sort of more medieval style castles?

[00:12:17.930] - Vin

Very medieval. There are some in the southern part of South Tyrol that are more like a villa that maybe more traditional Italian. But the ones in the more northern part of it are your true traditional medieval looking castles that look like they belong in a horror movie. And they sit up on a mountain and they are romantic on the one hand and terrifying on the other. But they're one of the top things that we like to go explore all over there, there's just so much fascinating history that, you know, relative to where we come from. I think the oldest building in our hometown is 150 years old. And there's castles over there that are a thousand years old. So it's just astounding.

[00:12:54.170] - Katy

It is astounding. Do you have a favorite one?

[00:12:56.270] - Vin

I have a favorite. But Kate what's yours?

[00:12:58.850] - Kate

I mean, I think it's probably Katzensungen for that, the old lady that they have found and getting the try out some of that wine that goes along with it, too. So that's probably my favorite.

[00:13:10.490] - Katy

Yeah. Look, you can always have wine!

[00:13:12.830] - Vin

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Right? No shortage of wine in South Tyrol. I would say my favorite castle is actually Castle Tyrol, which is just north of Murano, and it named the entire Tyrol region. That juts out on this, I think they call it a glacial moraine. So it's sitting up on this rock that just has vines scaling up to the basically the gate of the castle and you can hike right up to it. And some of the vistas from the trails are just breathtaking. So that'll be one I would definitely recommend anybody going to south Tyrol to visit Castle Tyrol. They also have a museum in there that gives you a history of the region. It's fascinating.

[00:13:51.630] - Katy

Excellent. Well, you've tempted me Kate. Now let's talk about the wine. So regular listeners to this podcast will know that every region of Italy has its own special wine and special grapes, that they grow in different varieties. What's the specialty in South Tyrol?

[00:14:09.170] - Kate

They've got one of each between the white and between the red. So there's Gewürztraminer, which is from the Tramin region of South Tyrol. And that is a really good kind of light white wine goes really well with Asian dishes. It's just delicious. And then there's also the Lagrein, which is their red wine, it's very full-bodied and delicious as well. But to be honest, there's really not a bad bottle there. They talk about how this region has the highest quality in all of Italy for their wines, even though they only produce maybe one percent of all the wines that come out of the whole country. So it's definitely high focused on quality.

[00:14:50.270] - Katy

Yeah, and they probably don't export much because of that. They're not making that much, so they probably keep all the good stuff for themselves.

[00:14:57.440] - Vin

They certainly do. It's hard to find sometimes. Yes.

[00:15:01.500] - Katy

I think when you buying wine over there, you probably not even looking for a bottle. I think it's probably okay just to go for the table wine, right? Yes. Every time.

[00:15:10.940] - Katy

A few euros and off you go. You don't have to be a wine aficionado in these parts of Italy.

[00:15:16.670] - Kate

No.

[00:15:18.530] - Katy

OK, so now as we know, Italian wine always goes with Italian food. And, you know, as you mentioned, it's very interesting up in the area with it's combination of Germanic and Italian influences. What's the food like?

[00:15:32.960] - Kate

Well, my favorite is always dessert. So what I like is the - it's called Buchteln, which is a little sweet rolls - you usually get about four of them together and then it has the vanilla sauce that just drizzles over and it's fabulous and light and wonderful. So you can still have a second dessert afterward. And then they also have Strauben, which is almost like a funnel cake. If you've had those that maybe a fair/carnival and then it has either a fruity jam that goes along with it or it is sprinkled with powdered sugar. They have those that a lot of different festivals that they have within the region, too. So those are my favorites.

[00:16:11.070] - Katy

Hmm. What about you Vin?

[00:16:13.430] - Vin

I would say my favorite. I'm more of a rustic, hearty kind of cuisine kind of guy, and I really like the Speckknödel. And that's a dumpling made with speck, which is a mountain smoked ham. And after a lengthy hike, sitting down at a hut with a cold beer and a plate of Speckknödel, there's nothing better. And on top of that, it's an Italian region. So the pasta and the pizza is phenomenal, too. There are many times when we go out and finish our hike and we just have a pizza and it's always the best pizza we've ever had, of course.

[00:16:50.690] - Katy

Isn't it funny? When you for some reason - even if you're not doing a hike, but you just sightseeing, you're walking around Italy, you do really build up a hunger, don't you? And then you sit down and you like, oh, my goodness, this is the best ever.

[00:17:06.320] - Vin

That's how this every time. Yeah. I definitely recommend anyone visiting that they really dive into the Tyrolean cuisine. That's the kind of the traditional cuisine that's going back centuries and Speck the mountain smoked ham. That's also hard to find in other places of the world. But once you've had that, you will not want to try any other Italian meat. I can guarantee it.

[00:17:28.670] - Katy

That's a big statement Vin. I do like smoked meat though, but I think it's really interesting. you can go from region to region in Italy and it'll be so different because you probably don't find too many tomato based sauces up in South Tyrol. Actually like you would in the South because guess what they don't grow there really do they?

[00:17:49.100] - Vin

Right. Right.

[00:17:50.450] - Katy

So it's more cream by sauces and that type of thing.

[00:17:54.110] - Kate

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Yes, very hearty. Very creamy. I would agree with that. A lot of very red meat, influential kinds of foods. But it's nice that you can get a little bit of the blend like Vin was talking about. We can go out and we can have like a traditional Italian meal at one place and then a traditional German Austrian meal or, you know, there's somewhere they do a fusion to between the two. So there's a lot of variety when it comes to cuisine, which is what makes it such a unique spot, I think.

[00:18:22.350] - Katy

Yeah, and I'm going to say something controversial here, because sometimes when you are traveling around Italy - like I love Italian food, but if you've been there for like three or four weeks, after a while you're like 'I need something a bit different' I didn't really say that at listeners!! But it's true - you don't get a little bit you know, you want something -something a little bit more variety. And that's what's amazing about South Tyrol, because you've got all these different types of sauces. And even though they have pasta and noodles, it's like more creamy and buttery. Yummy! I'm getting hungry now. And I think now it's a good time to say, look, you can listen when Kate and Vin are talking, they're saying the words in like German or Austrian and but it's part of Italy now. So what language can you speak up there, like if you need to make yourself understood?

[00:19:10.730] - Kate

So German is their primary language up there. And then they have Italian as a secondary. But we get around quite fine with English, to be honest. And it's gotten more and more familiar of language as the years have gone on, as we've started to travel there more and more. So I think you can really get by with anything. I'm just trying to learn Italian on my own because I think that's fun and it's great for exercising that muscle.

[00:19:36.030] - Vin

When you go to a restaurant, you're going to have a menu. It's going to be in German and in Italian. And if you go to a, you know, a castle or museum, most of the displays there will be written in the description, be written in German or Italian. You will not find a lot of English over there. But for us, that's that's kind of fun. We like the challenge of trying to decipher what it is we're looking at. And as we've gone over over the years, Kate tends to gravitate more towards the Italian language and I like the German, but I don't pretend to be fluent in it at all.

[00:20:08.310] - Katy

Yes, we're all working on it. I did German in high school, actually, and it does come in handy sometimes.

[00:20:13.590] - Vin

Right. But yeah, I think in anywhere you go, it's nice just to be able to have a bit of the language just to feel like you're fitting in anyway. I think it's a really important part of travel actually.

[00:20:24.120] - Vin

Totally agree.

[00:20:25.460] - Katy

Yeah. OK, right. So let's think about like we're going there. Right. We've decided we want to grab those noodles. I'm going to go to the castle with the vines of the old lady wine. Sounds amazing. So how on earth do we get there like - what's the deal?

[00:20:38.340] - Vin

So for arriving in Italy, there's not - well in South Tyrol - there's not an airport in the region. So you're going to have basically three options that at least that we always find convenient is flying in either to Venice and then you can take a transfer shuttle. We like to rent a car and drive. You could fly into Verona from Milan and also Munich. So you would be driving from Germany down. So it's going to be a three hour drive, pretty much no matter where you fly into to go visit South Tyrol. So I know that for some people that seems daunting. But we've made that trip numerous times and it's really enjoyable because along the way you can, of course, plan a trip where you can stop at different destinations such as Lake Garda, which is about an hour south of South Tyrol. And that's just absolutely amazing, the villages around there. So it's in a way, visiting South Tyrol allows you to see more of Italy because there isn't a direct airport into it.

[00:21:40.350] - Katy

I think it's really interesting because it is like a little pocket all of its own and you do need to, like, invest a bit of time to get there. And I don't think the transport links are that good, if you wanted to - if you didn't want to drive.

[00:21:54.090] - Kate

There's definitely a lot of connections you need to take. So but I guess the nice part about it is we like to go in the fall and then you can fly into Munich, check out OctoberFest then had to South Tyrol for a little bit of wine so you get a little bit of wine, a little bit of beer.

[00:22:10.560] - Katy

Oh, that sounds good. Yeah. But I mean, like, I think back to the trains though. It's just I think you can do it, but it's slow I think.

[00:22:20.820] - Vin

Right. And we like the independence of renting a car, because when you're driving through South Tyrol or probably anywhere near that way, I imagine, you see things off in the distance and you want to know what -what is that? What is that old church? What is that old castle, that old building. And with a rental car, you can just go. And we always recommend that people rent a car when going to South Tyrol. We have tips on our website about how to drive in Italy. It's actually very similar to how we drive in America. I don't know about Australia, but it's actually it's very fun. It was a very fun country to drive in. Everyone's always scared about it. But if you're not in Rome, if you're not in Florence driving, you're fine.

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[00:23:03.810] - Katy

Yeah. And there's some absolutely spectacular routes you can take as well in the Dolomites, like world famous, really, aren't there? So can you tell us a bit about some of those?

[00:23:12.360] - Vin

Yes. Yeah, so you can drive through Valcadenegarda and you never really need to leave your car to enjoy the peaks. And they're all around you. Of course, we we always. Have to get out at the first trail and go hiking, but yeah, just driving throughout South Tyrol. You can probably get from one end to the other within four hours on the Autostrada. In terms of basing yourself in the region, we always try to put ourselves right in the middle because there's so much of it that we want to see because it's so, as Kate mentioned earlier, the contrasting landscapes you have the Mediterranean where you can sit underneath a palm tree in the morning by a pool and you can be up in the snowcapped mountains in the afternoon hiking. And that's all within a two hour drive. And if you have a rental car, makes it very easy to do that.

[00:23:59.390] - Katy

So what are some of the towns where you could buy yourself when you're there? I would recommend basing between Bolzano and Merano. Bolzano's the capital city. And there's a town called Lana, which is kind of tucked in between the two. And it puts you right off the famous wine road of South Tyrol. You see, you have a chance to explore the wine road, which leads to towards Trentino, but also the Dolomites are within about an hour drive. So you can be among the clouds in no time from Lana, but also experience all the Mediterranean aspects of the region, from the vineyards to the orchards to the palm trees to the beautiful town of Merano and Bolzano as well.

[00:24:45.080] - Katy

It sounds pretty magical to me. Hello, Lana, where are you? I'm looking up on the map now. Oh, my goodness. And what sort of - what style of accommodation can you get there? Because I think it's a little bit different than some other parts of Italy.

[00:25:00.500] - Kate

Yeah, there's a lot of different options. One of our favorites is where we can stay in a little type of a condo within the vineyards and then with a castle overlooking. So there's some options like that that you can also stay in some cabins in the woods. And then there's even just basic apartments and hotels. So it really kind of depends on what you're interested in, but it definitely has a lot of different options available.

[00:25:25.400] - Vin

And if you're really looking for a full resort experience, they're the best resorts I've ever stayed in are in South Tyrol. And they offer everything from massages to spa treatments to full board. South Tyrol - the resorts are scattered kind of all over the region, so you can stay in the Dolomites, you can stay more towards Merano and more into the Alps, but you can also stay in some of the cities. Walking the towns is also a great experience because there's just so

much history there. We've stayed in Brixen, the Villanders, Bolzano and Murano and all of those are fascinating too.

[00:26:05.010] - Katy

When I was researching, I was having a really big trouble trying to work out where to stay, so the tip about Lana was really good. We ended up deciding to stay in Bolzano, and that was because of some timing issues. But can you tell us a little bit about Bolzano? Because it's a little cute city isn't it and it's got - its very interesting.

[00:26:24.170] - Kate

It is a very cute city and it's, I think, the biggest city that they have within the region and they have a gorgeous cathedral there as well, their Duomo is stunning. And you can also get to- there's a lot of cafes around there where you can kind of bop around and check out the different cafes, have an espresso if you go in the Christmas time, too, they have a great Christmas market that's just adorable with their main piazza, the Walther Piazza. So it's a really, really nice town. Everything's very walkable, very easy. Lots of markets that you can check out, which is one of my favorites to go in and grab some fresh fruit, some fresh sandwiches at the market. So everything's very convenient there.

[00:27:04.850] - Katy

And I think they're got some really old guy they haven't they -like in the museum.

[00:27:11.030] - Kate

They do have an old guy.

[00:27:14.180] - Vin

Yeah, he's about 5000 years old and he doesn't talk much, but he is fun to look at. Ötzi the Iceman, you know, he was found in the Northern Alps. I want to say 19 - early 1990s. I don't remember the exact date. Yeah. He's from I can't remember the name of the period. What is the name of that period?

[00:27:36.290] - Katy

It's the Stone Age or something like that I think.

[00:27:38.660] - Vin

Stone Age. Yeah. Anyways. Hikers found him and they thought that they stumbled upon a body maybe from World War Two or something like that and then when they were looking at the remains, they saw that there was a bow and arrow and he was wearing attire that wasn't very 1940ish. So they they managed to preserve his body. And he is on display in Bolzano in the South Tyrolean Museum of Archeology. And that's a fascinating - it's a museum dedicated to one individual which you wouldn't think is possible, but when you walk through it and they give you a kind of this grand tour of the history of how they found him, as well as how he may have lived thousands of years ago, it's really fascinating.

[00:28:24.650] - Kate

And also how they preserved him after all these years, too, because there just wasn't the technology back then when they found him to know how to keep something that preserved. So there's a lot of information on that, too, which is fascinating.

[00:28:38.120] - Katy

I just love when all the history and the technology combines. It's so interesting. And I'm really looking forward to seeing this guy, the real Flinstone of South Tyrol. That's what I'm going to call him.

[00:28:51.470] - Vin

It's a good name for him.

[00:28:52.910] - Katy

But I kind of want to go to town hopping. And I'm know in these type of areas. Are there some really, really lovely little alpine villages you can visit as well?

[00:29:02.810]

Oh, definitely. When you're driving through South Tyrol, you can see them from the highway and you just want to go up there and sit down at a cafe and have a glass of wine. But one of my favorites is Tramin. There's sixteen wine villages in South Tyrol and Tamin lies right on the what they call the South Tyrolean Wine Road. And it's just if you picture a romantic wine village set in the mountains, that's that's Tramin. There's old churches all around and vineyards, pretty much every square inch of the town. So that's a fascinating place to visit. But we've been there for different festivals and visiting different wineries. So really enjoy Tramin.

[00:29:45.410] - Katy

I love the little churches because I do a lot of Instagram scrolling and just research. And I love the spired churches that they have. And the straight towers - they're very different to maybe even just a little further south which have more domed churches. But these ones are more pointy aren't they - they've got the pointy spires.

[00:30:06.470] - Vin

And yeah, that's that's a Tyrolean influence.

[00:30:09.620] - Katy

Yeah. OK, can you tell us a little bit about Ortisei ? Because I've got my eye on that one.

[00:30:14.420] - Kate

Yeah, that's the big wood carving region. So what's kind of neat about it, that is that they have this history of wood carving traditions that they've passed down from generation to generation. So it's these families who have learned these skills and they have such incredible, such incredible carvings that have come out of there. It's really kind of neat. So what we've

done there is we've just bounced around from different wood carving shops to another and checked out everything that they have going on there. But that's one of my favorite parts of Ortisei.

[00:30:43.730] - Vin

The other really cool thing, about Ortisei, is that there are lifts to get into different really popular hiking spots in the Dolomites so you can take from Ortisei you can take a lift that'll get you up to Seceda. That's one of the most popular, I guess, most iconic peaks of the Dolomites. And on our website, we have a step by step guide and how you do that. But also on the other side of Ortisei, you can take a cable lift car right on up to Alpe di Siusi, which is the largest alpine pasture I mentioned earlier. So it's kind of really a launching point for exploring the Dolomites. But also you can really dive into the woodcarving culture of Val Gardena, which is the valley that it sits in. We love Ortisei. There's just some incredible places to stay right around right there, that you can get the benefits of Alpine wellness with some spa treatments and then also enjoy the town itself.

[00:31:38.100] - Katy

Lovely. Now, I want to mention to our listeners, because one thing and the reason why I came across Kate and Vin's site is that the resources in English for this region are pretty woeful apart from their site. So it's really hard to get information about these lifts and the way that things work there in terms of the tourism infrastructure. And it's really if you spoke Italian or German, I think it would be much easier. But, you know, for someone who's coming with English, you don't know some of these things. So there's some really key things I think the people need to know. And I think let's talk about the seasons first, because that caught me out actually. There's two main seasons, isn't there?

[00:32:21.840] - Vin

Yeah, there's the summer season and the winter season for the skiers. We're not skiers. So when we go there in the winter, it's to do some snowshoeing and to check out the Christmas markets. The summer season is the most popular - you run into a lot of Germans that come down and vacation there as well as Italians. We always recommend that people visit in the off seasons because we don't like crowds and most people don't. And if you time it right, you can visit the Dolomites and the lifts will still be open and most of the mountain huts up on the mountain will be open as well. And that is between, I would say, late September and through October. And also late spring, so the lift start to open up late May typically, of course, all this changes, depending on the weather in any given year and then through early June, if you start arriving in later June through August, it's going to be crowded and there's nothing wrong with that. But we prefer to go and you can really experience the change of the seasons, whether it's in the spring with the apple blossoms really start flowering and it's just gorgeous. A lot of the valleys that have the orchards and then in the fall, the change of the leaf colors on the vineyards and in the orchards, you're going to be busy with your camera for sure.

[00:33:38.770] - Kate

But one of the nice things about South Tyrol is that they get the advantage of a fifth season, which is what they always talk about. And their fifth season is Törggelen, where they have a celebration of the new wines that have come out and you get to try all the new wines from the different vineyards. And then they also have a big feast that surrounds it and a lot of chestnut related desserts and dishes. So it's a really cool festivity to take part in. So we highly recommend it and always encourage going in the fall for that particular season.

[00:34:10.720] - Vin

And Törggelen runs from October typically through up through the middle of November. So it's not doesn't take place on a weekend. It's an ongoing tradition.

[00:34:21.490] - Katy

That sounds like my type of thing too. So it's really interesting, though, because like I think this is an excellent, excellent example of how seasonal the regions in Italy and Europe can be. And so if you like skiing and snowboarding, you can have an experience there in the winter. But if you want to do some walking, maybe the May, June, as you said, now we were going to go in March. And what happened to me is I started doing the research and I've got to say I was getting a little bit frustrated, but I found out, oh, my goodness, if we're going to go in March - while we could be doing the driving around, which is OK and it's fine, if we wanted to do any hiking or get up to any altitude - the lifts were probably not going to be open. And so that's when I went 'oh' and I had to do a real rethink of what we were going to do. And so really thinking through that's really important, I think.

[00:35:17.420] - Vin

Absolutely, because if you're going to go like in March, April, the South Tyrol is 80 percent mountains. So if you're - naturally you're going there for more than likely to enjoy the nature. And it's still winter up in the higher elevations and they shut down after the ski season and they take a break until the summer season. So you really want to pay attention to the dates when you go. We we have links to the different lift schedules on our website. So you want to know when exactly a lift is going to open so that if you're planning to do hiking in the Dolomites, you're going to be able to hop on a lift for fifteen to thirty dollars and get up to the mountain quickly. You can hike all the way up if you want, but we've done that a couple of times and it is exhausting. So we recommend using the lifts as much as possible because once you're up on the mountains, there's plenty of hiking to do right around at the top of the peaks where you can spend the whole day and a lot of times we'll hike down versus taking the lift down. And that just allows you to see the mountain from a whole new perspective.

[00:36:19.400] - Katy

Yeah, I mean, why push yourself too hard? I say just use a lift to go up and then I'm sure the hiking down is actually quite challenging too though.

[00:36:27.830] - Vin

It can be yes - we recommend bring poles. If you're going to hike down, you're definitely going to want to have poles to take some of the pressure off your knees as you're going down.

[00:36:37.210] - Katy

Yeah, but I mean, lucky you mentioned that. So there's still some alpine pasture hikes as well, so if you're not, like, super fit or your knees are a bit wobbly, then there's still going to be something there for you, too, right?

[00:36:47.810] - Vin

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. One of the one of the really neat things about South Tyrol is that they make the mountains really accessible to anybody because of the lift system that they have in place - is world class. We've seen people up on the mountains that are in their 80s walking around and it always puts a smile on our face to see people at that age still out there exploring. And in South Tyrol it's possible.

[00:37:10.100] - Katy

That's fantastic. I love it. Now, I know a lot of people, they're going to go, "I want to see this! I want to see those mountains. I want to see those lakes, but I only have a few days or I only have a day". Yeah, there are day trips from Venice, which would be pretty fast paced, I would imagine. Would you recommend doing a day trip on your own from Venice or somewhere like that?

[00:37:34.010] - Vin

We try not to advise people to do day trips because the mountain weather can be unpredictable. So you could do a day trip from from Venice and drive into the mountains and the Dolomites are basically masked and you can't see the peaks because just the weather change. So to really enjoy the mountains of South Tyrol, you're going to want to plan to spend a full week in the region. And that's going to give you a chance to also experience the diverse culture between the Tyrolean and the Italian. You'll also be able to experience maybe if you're going out of the Dolomites more the Mediterranean side of it. A day is risky only because of the weather. You can certainly try it. And if I were to do it from Venice, I'd probably go visit Lagos Di Braies from Venice. And that's, as I mentioned earlier, one of the most photographed lakes in the world. And that's a short hike around the lake. So you could try to do that in a day trip. It's risky.

[00:38:30.530] - Katy

I mean, we would we had originally planned five days and I realized it really wasn't enough, actually. And, you know, I can be one of those people that likes to try and do quite a lot, I would say. But I've learned to tone things down over the years. But still even with five days, I was thinking, goodness, there's so many things to see here that I'm really going to have to be very focused about what we want to do if we're going to make the most of our time here.

[00:38:59.540] - Vin

Very true. We've been visiting since 2014 and we feel like we've scratched the surface, to be honest on what there is to see in South Tyrol. And we're planning to turn over every nook and cranny.

[00:39:11.810] - Kate

So Kate seem to love the festivals. Now, you told us about a couple. Is there any other ones that you'd like to tell us about?

[00:39:19.410] - Kate

Yeah, I think the next biggest one for me after the others I mentioned would be Speckfest, where they have a celebration of the smoked meats that they make in the mountains, which is a fabulous place to get the Strauben and dessert that I mentioned earlier, that funnel cake type of dessert. And then they always have it, all of these huge bands that are playing - local bands. So you get to hear the traditional music, which is awesome, and then really - you feel like you're truly immersing yourself in in the culture and the experience, because so much of this draws in the locals. It's not just a tourist attraction. So many of these festivals, that would be one of my biggest.

[00:39:59.630] - Katy

Oh, and do they dress up? Do they have the traditional sort of German traditional costumes?

[00:40:04.400] - Kate

They do, yes. Yeah they do actually, I think the last time we went was to the Morano Grape Fest that they have in the fall where again, kind of celebrating the new wines and a lot of there's a ton of the traditions dress, which is so cool to see, and they do the traditional dances and play the traditional songs, so.

[00:40:23.950] - Vin

We had more fun at the Murano Grape Festival than OktoberFest. They end the entire festival with a grand parade through Murano and each community around the region has a float. And it's just neat to see they kind of highlight their specialty. So, for example, Marlengo our town over there and their specialty is apples. And so they have an apple float, the Murano Grape Festival, we think if I were to tell somebody to go to Oktoberfest or Murano Grape festival, I would say Murano, Grape Festival every time.

[00:40:53.230] - Katy

That's a secret. I'm like, I'm not really a beer drinker. More of a wine drink. So it just really appeals to me that you get all that sort of cool sort of cultural influences plus wine instead of beer, sign me up!

[00:41:05.400] - Vin

Right.

[00:41:06.760] - Katy

But the clincher - do they dress the cows for this parade? Do they get the cows dressed up included in the parade?

[00:41:19.090] - Vin

They dress up the horses for the parade, the cows, I think they leave up in the pastures for the parade. But yeah, no, I know what you're talking about. They do dress up the cows. We haven't actually not seen that part of or that tradition take place where they bring them down from the pastures each year. But yeah, we know what you're talking about.

[00:41:37.180] - Katy

Yeah. Because I think they dress - they put the flower garlands on them, don't they.

[00:41:40.630] - Katy

Right. Right. I love cows and baby goats. Let's just my thing.

[00:41:47.650] - Vin

Hopefully you like chickens too because you'll see plenty of those on the trails.

[00:41:50.890] - Katy

Oh like wild chickens?

[00:41:53.920] - Vin

You're walking on - when you're walking through some of the valleys that I mentioned earlier, you'll walk straight through different farmsteads. A lot of times you'll have to pause and wait for a chicken to pass or a herd of chickens, and they don't always hurry on by. So you might have to sit there for a while and just watch them. Which is fine.

[00:42:11.630] - Katy

Oh, I love it. That sounds so cool.

[00:42:14.200] - Vin

Yeah it's very cool.

[00:42:15.340] - Katy

Oh, well, now we're coming to our end of our conversation. So is there anything we have missed that you want to tell people about South Tyrol?

[00:42:21.730] - Vin

I would sum it up that a lot of Italy is all about the culture, which is great. But South Tyrol is also you can get the culture and you can get the adventure. So it's really this great combination of both. You can go and spend as much time as you want in the towns and check out the castles and get into history and of course, all the cuisine between the German and the Italian, but then getting out there and really experiencing nature and its rawest form,

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that's what we really love about South Tyrol. So if you're trying to decide on if South Tyrol is a place for you, I guess if you love the outdoors and you love history, it's definitely a place that you should check out because you're going to get both there versus going to for example, you go to Venice, you know, Venice is beautiful, but you're not going to see any wildlife except for whatever floating through the canal.

[00:43:15.700] - Katy

Well actually have a tip for you on that for your next visit, because you can actually see flamingos on the Outer Lagoon. I did not know that. Yeah, well, you can hire kayaks and go out around the lagoon there. It's really - it's actually pretty cool. But yeah, it's like it's one of those beautiful, amazing combinations of regions that, you know, sometimes you see these photos, but you don't really know quite what else there is there. And I really appreciate that you have your website and that it's there sharing this with us. And you've also got a great Instagram account. So what I do is I mentioned to our listeners that I had to use your site and I've mentioned earlier and really everyone that's listening, if you want to go if you want to go to South Tyrol, please go and check out Kate and Vins site and I'll let them tell you how they can stay in touch.

[00:44:07.330] - Vin

Yeah, our our website is 'thronandvine' just as it sounds. And when you go there, we have a free travel resource library that has multiple PDFs, with different checklists. How to guides. We cover how to hike this Seced, Alpe di Siusi and the best way to get to the region where to stay. And that's all free. So go to our website and you can click right on the link and sign up and you'll get access to that resource library. And of course, you can also follow us on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter.

[00:44:38.260] - Katy

Well, I've put to say, if you like beautiful photos, I'm not sure which of you is the photographer or if you're both taking the photos, but they're absolutely gorgeous.

[00:44:46.110] - Vin

Thanks

[00:44:46.290] - Kate

Thank you.

[00:44:48.580] - Katy

Make sure you follow Throne and Vine. Grazie Kate and Vin for taking us to beautiful South Tyrol and the Dolomites region, as we mentioned, this is such a popular region for our listeners, so no doubt this episode will be getting a lot of attention and the region will be getting extra attention and as travel resumes, hopefully in the not too distant future. And I really hope to see you up on one of those mountain pasture trails one day and or maybe at the festival drinking some wine.

[00:45:18.390] - Vin
Absolutely!

[00:45:20.400] - Katy

I'm always amazed at just how diverse the regions of Italy are, with one foot in Austria and your head in the fresh mountain air of South Tyrol you're a whole world away from the coastal sea breezes and Greek and Arab influences of the South. And I think that is part of the reason why I love to return to Italy again and again. There is always something or somewhere new and interesting to explore that has unique culture, history, traditions and of course, food and wine. If you're interested in visiting South Tyrol and the Dolomites, make sure to follow Throne and Vine on the Instagram and blog. You can't fail to be inspired by the gorgeous photos and practical advice for making the most of your trip to this region. We put all the information about the places mentioned into the show notes, untolditaly.com/64 for episode 64. And I'm excited to share the Katy and Vin have promised to come back and do an episode on hiking in the area, which I can't wait to record. It was so fantastic to hear that there are options for all levels of ability to enjoy the natural beauty of the Dolomites. So we'll look forward to that one.

[00:46:28.650] - Katy

Did you enjoy today's show? We would love it if you left a rating or a review. That helps other people who are dreaming and planning trips to Italy to keep dreaming while we can't be there. That's all for our show today. We'll be back next week with more Italian secrets and ideas. Make sure to subscribe to Untold Italy on your favorite podcast app, so you are notified as soon as we release the next episode. But for now, it's Ciao for now!