

# Untold Italy Episode 66 - A solo trip to Northern Italy

[00:00:00.030] - Katy

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 66.

[00:00:12.830] - Josie

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

[00:00:15.920] - Katy

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

[00:00:19.730] - Josie

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

[00:00:27.800] - Katy

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

[00:00:36.650] - Josie

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

[00:00:43.730] - Katy

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

[00:00:46.820] - Josie

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

[00:01:00.700] - Katy

Benvenuti! Ciao to everyone listening wherever you are in the world. It's Katy here with another episode of Untold Italy Travel podcast and one that I hope inspires you to hold onto your Italian dreams and learn some great tips about travel in Italy. Travel to Italy is not currently possible, unfortunately, but after a year of the pandemic shoots of hope are appearing, and while we may need to be patient for a little longer, we cannot let go of those dreams as they are the things that make life all the more special.

[00:01:32.230] - Katy

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For this week's episode, we're doing something a little bit different and hearing from one of our listeners, who followed her dreams and went on her trip to Italy in 2019. She tells us her experience planning her trip, how it went when she finally got there. Lessons learned and things she'd do differently. We're going to do a bit more of these episodes because I think it's always a great idea to hear others perspectives on how they plan their travels. If you'd like to share your story and your trip report with us, then drop us a line at [ciao@untolditaly.com](mailto:ciao@untolditaly.com).

[00:02:03.170] - Katy

Our guest today is Canadian Valerie Hansen, who currently lives in Seattle. Valerie and I have known each other over the years through her travel blog, Maple Leopard, but it wasn't until she joined our Italy Travel planning community on Facebook that we got to know each other a little better. You see, Valerie had planned a trip to northern Italy with a friend, but at the last minute, things went a bit, shall we say, pear shaped or awry. And she had to do some quick thinking and reorganizing to get things back on track. Let's hear from Valerie now about how she planned her trip to Italy and what she discovered when she got there. Benvenuta Ciao and welcome to the Untold Italy podcast, Valerie.

[00:02:44.360] - Valerie

Thank you. Hey, I'm glad to be here. Thanks for having me, Katy.

[00:02:48.540] - Katy

Oh, it's great to have you on the show today, Valerie. I was just telling our listeners a little bit about your background, but could you tell them your story and what inspired you to visit Italy.

[00:02:57.410] - Valerie

Sure! So I'm a travel blogger, content creator. I've been traveling for several years with my husband and my kids when they were little. We did a lot of road trips, but I never really traveled solo or ventured abroad till I was past 50. So being in some travel blog groups online really fueled my wanderlust. Yours was one of them I used to see in the female travel bloggers group and others in there that have traveled all over abroad. So that really fueled my wanderlust to want to go to Italy. And a girlfriend of mine asked me in September of 2019 if I would like to go to Europe, and she had been there several years ago, backpacking in Spain, France, all over Western Europe. And so I felt confident to go with her because she already had been there, knew what she was doing. Well at the last minute she could not go. She had a family issue. It wasn't really emergency, but it was a serious thing. And so I understood. But at the same time, I freaked out. And thankfully, your group rescued me. Untold Italy or Italy travel planning, rather, which is a thing off your blog. Anyway, that rescued me and helped me plan my trip and gain confidence to go as a solo female to a foreign country. And if it hadn't been for that, I don't think I would have went.

[00:04:30.980] - Katy

Oh look, I remember it so well. You were so worried, which is completely normal. And natural - when you're traveling halfway around the world to a country you've never been to on your

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own. And it was just an amazing response. And I actually would never forget it because so many people just came and said, Valerie, you've got to go. You've got to go to Italy. You're going to love it so much. And thankfully, you built up the confidence to do it. And I'm just so happy that you did.

[00:04:57.720] - Valerie

Yes, I'm very happy it was the trip of a lifetime and the memories are forever etched in my head, I will never forget them. And yeah, it was one of the most amazing trips of my life.

[00:05:11.010] - Katy

Oh, I can't wait to hear all about it. OK, so let's just take a step back and have a chat about what you planned for your itinerary. So you were going to visit northern Italy weren't you?

[00:05:22.560] - Valerie

Correct. So I chose Milan because I and my friend, whom we had planned to go, she also had a friend there that she wanted to hook up with. And so when we started talking about taking the trip, we started discussing itinerary, as you just asked, and Milan came to the forefront because I love fashion. I've always been a huge fashion lover. And I so and my blog was originally about fashion. And as time went on, I added travel. So now travel is my main niche, but fashion is still there. So anyway, going to Milan, the fashion capital of the world, was always a dream of mine. So I made that my home base. And then when it ended up that I was going to go by myself, I was like, oh gosh, what am I going to do now? How am I going to visit all these other places? Am I going to reserve a hotel two days over here, a day over here, take the train, lug my suitcase on the train four different times? And I'm like, no, I'm not going to do that. And then when I talked to several women in your group, you know, some of them advised me, well, if you could stay in one place and I even thought of that myself, too. So I planted myself in Milan close to Milano Centrale. It was about five minutes from the train station. And it was awesome because every other day I was there for a total of nine days, including my flying time, which was not enough. Big mistake. If you go to Italy, don't stay for a week. It's not enough. But anyway, yeah, I did day trips every other day and that worked out great.

[00:07:01.230] - Katy

Yeah, and Milan is such an amazing city. I think some people who have been to Rome, well Florence, they get to Milan and sometimes they think, oh, they're a bit disappointed because it's not doesn't have that necessarily, that old world feel but boy is it exciting! Like I find it a really fun, exciting city and it's got.

[00:07:20.850] - Valerie

Yes

[00:07:21.540] - Katy

Yeah. It's got all the fashion and the design elements as well. What do you love about it?

[00:07:26.800] - Valerie

Well, it's kind of funny that you said people didn't don't like it as much because it doesn't have that old world charm. I mean, I would say it doesn't have as much as like Venice or some of the places have really grand architecture. But I driving down the city, sitting in that big double decker bus on the top and, you know, just taking it all in. I saw lots of amazing architecture like castles for Sozesco. I think I'm saying that.

[00:07:55.150] - Katy

Right. So Sforzesco Castle, it's a harbor.

[00:07:58.720] - Valerie

That castle. I've never seen anything like that in my life. It was amazing with big moats, like in the old days. And there was even cats running around down there in the moats I'm a cat lover. So I noticed that right away and the whole grounds in the back and the grandeur of it all. So that was a favorite. Definitely. The Duomo was probably my number one and the rooftop at first I wasn't going to go to the rooftop. I took a tour with Get Your Guide. And so they took us around the inside and then they said, you're free to go up to the top and you have to purchase a separate ticket. And it took a little longer than I thought. And it had other things on my list that day for my itinerary. So I go, I don't know, I think about it. Well, I almost didn't do it. And then a couple of days before I left, I'm like, I've got to get up on that rooftop and I'm so glad I did because. Oh, my. The views from up there, you can see all over the whole city the pictures you can get and you can actually walk through all those big, huge architectural needles or whatever you want to call them. There's little like arches and you can walk all around the perimeter of the roof like it was just incredible. So the Duomo and then also the Starbucks Roastery Reserve was pretty incredible. The pastries were to die for. I'd never seen anything like that either here in America. And then, oh, the shopping. The shopping was amazing. I could have spent just a whole month on shopping in Milan and I didn't even cover an iota of it. But my favorite spots I loved Corso Buenos Aires because it's this big, long street and it has lots and lots of affordable goods, outfits, accessories, et cetera. And I loved Vittorio Emanuele. And yeah, those spots were pretty incredible. And I just spent some time walking around Vittorio Emanuele and just taking in the incredible architecture and all the beautiful shops and things to look at.

[00:10:15.220] - Katy

Everything is so elegant there, isn't it? So there's such care and attention that's put into like dressing the windows and how everything's displayed. And I just I love it.

[00:10:26.130] - Valerie

Yes, it's incredible.

[00:10:28.240] - Katy

I've seen some of the most amazing shoes of my life and encrusted with, like Swarovski crystals. And it's just like - ooh!

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[00:10:37.000] - Valerie

I didn't see those ones, boy I missed the boat on that. But I bought five purses in Milan, but not one pair of shoes. Can you believe that? I went back the last day and walked around Corso Buenos Aires because it was not a very far walk from my hotel. And I specifically looked for a pair of shoes before I went to the airport and I could not find any at the last minute. So I really regret that - who goes to Italy and doesn't come back with a pair of shoes? I mean, come on!

[00:11:07.300] - Katy

And you have to leave room in your luggage for that. I mean, not everyone likes shopping, but I do. And I love - just to pick out something super special as my souvenir and something that's unique and that's been designed that no one else probably has at home, they say to you, well, when did you get that from? And you you go 'oh I got it in Venice!'. Oh, well, so you love the Duomo. And obviously the Duomo is amazing. And the Galleria, which is right next door and the castle. And did you manage to get down to the canal area in Milan?

[00:11:44.810] - Valerie

I did. The canals of Navigli. That was pretty cool. I actually did that the same day as I went to the Prada Museum. So a little side note about the museum. It was great. It was big. It was grand. But I was very disappointed because there was no fashion there. It was all art. There was a few outfits. But, you know, that's my bad because I didn't research or I mean, I looked it up on the website, but I didn't really dig into the details. So little hint there. If you know you're going to a museum, dig into the details, because it might not be what you think. But that trip turned out that day to be really cool because right around the corner from the main street drag that you take, it's not very far from the canals down to the museum was this huge street market like a flea market. And I just hit it lucky because I talked to a few people there and they said, oh, yeah, this only happens once a year on this day. And I'm like, really? Well, I hit pay dirt. Except the bad thing was, is I was near the end of my trip and I hadn't taken out a lot more cash. So most of those places only accepted cash euros. And I didn't have any - very much on me, I think at 20 or 30. And so I spent the last of my change. But so another hint. Keep lots of cash in your pocket. Well, not lots, but if you're going on a day trip like that, make sure you have enough. Because surprise things like that pop up and then.

[00:13:23.750] - Katy

I actually know that flea market really well. I think it's actually held once a month on a Sunday.

[00:13:27.920] - Valerie

Oh I thought they told me once a year.

[00:13:30.920] - Katy

It might be different one, but it's the one in Navigli near the canals. It's on like either the first or the second Sunday of the month. Anyway, it is absolutely wonderful. And yeah, if you're interested in anything vintage or like antique, it's it's a place to go. Definitely. I loved it.

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[00:13:50.690] - Valerie

Yeah it was amazing. There was people there with scarves and, you know, T-shirts and food. Street vendors with food. It just went on for blocks and blocks. I thought my feet were going to fall.

[00:14:05.180] - Katy

I mean, you can buy something, everything there from like old records to chandeliers and but they in immaculate quality, like it's not like a second hand market sometimes like you get here. I don't know about where you are - but these are like some really fancy, beautiful things you can get the. All right, was there anything else you wanted to mention about Milan?

[00:14:25.280] - Valerie

Milan has like - it seems like a hundred different modes of transportation. I could not believe it. There's motorcycles, cars, cable cars, the metro, the train, and then this other thing that looks kind of like a monorail, I mean, the options are endless. So you don't have to worry about getting around Milan. It's just navigating how to get there.

[00:14:47.360] - Katy

Yeah. Look, I think it's worthwhile doing a bit of research before you go to understand the transport options of Milan. You do actually need, well unless you are staying right in the center, you're probably going to have to need to use some transport. Unlike some of the other cities that you might visit - so in Florence and Rome, oftentimes you can get away without using transport, but yeah, I think, yeah, you need to really look up and see where you are on the transport map and get some help from someone who's going to help you.

[00:15:17.450] - Valerie

I learned some valuable lessons, like the fact that I got thrown into this by myself at the last minute. I was trying to focus on the details that would help me survive the most. And transportation is a big one. But I was more focused. I guess on finding the trains to go on the day trips and I had no problem with that. You know, it's really easy to navigate and reserve it online with Rome to Rio or Italia Train. Both of those are really good sites, easy to navigate, very affordable. And I had no problem with that at all. It was just when I was in Milan trying to navigate the Metro. So.

[00:15:58.640] - Katy

I think it's really interesting because Milanese a really big city and it's you know, it's not necessarily as touristy as some of the other ones. So people like any big city around the world, people are trying to get to their business and that's why they're kind of rushing around. But let's talk about some of the day trips, because I think you really did make most of your time there by - what a clever idea to do one day in Milan and one day as a day trip. I think that's a great idea. So you get the time to wander and recuperate and understand the city a bit better. And then also you see some of the parts of Italy. Great idea.

[00:16:32.570] - Valerie

Yeah. So the day trips I did from Milan were Cinque Terre, Venice. So those two I did on my own. I planned the whole thing on my own, taking the train and doing the sights on my own. The third one was a bus tour that left from Lugano, one of the main train stations just over from Milana Centra. The name of it has left my mind, but it's a pretty popular one and one of the bigger train stations. And so Get Your Guide tour leaves out of there and you'll see it when you reserve the tour. But anyhow, it was a bus tour and both of the agents on the bus were very knowledgeable. They were locals. And so they took us over the Italian border into Switzerland, to Lugano, Switzerland, and we spent three hours there. Then we went about fifteen minutes and hopped on a ferry. I'm from Washington State and the ferries here are humongous. That ferry looked like a toy car compared to the ones we have here. But anyhow, it still fit cars and it fit a lot of people on it. So of course we walked on and left the bus on the side of the road and we went to Bellagio. And the Bellagio is so dreamy. It's like you're in another world. Oh, my goodness. And in Bellagio is where I had the very best meal. I sat on the waterfront overlooking Lake Como. It was in late October and the hot sun was beating down. It was about seventy five degrees, clear blue skies, pretty Alps back dropped all around us. And I ordered as the tour guides recommended, they said, OK, if you if you want to taste authentic Italian cuisine here, order perche fish over a bed of rice. Oh my goodness. To die for I will never forget how good that was. So I had that. We spent about four hours. I got lost. I went wandering way up the hill. There's a huge hill there and I kind of departed from the group when she first took everybody on a little walk into it for ten minutes and then she said she let everybody loose. Well, I kind of departed from the walking tour a little sooner than I should have. And when I tried to come back, I made a wrong turn and I ended up at the top. I mean, it seemed like it was an island, but I don't think it is. It just seemed that way. And I was at the top of the island in my mind. I had to be back by a certain time or they would leave without me, so I just kept at it and finally this American couple was walking out on the street in front of me and I said, hey, are you going down to the waterfront? And they said, yeah. I said, Can I follow you - I'm lost! They said, sure. So I made my way back down there. And then we hopped back on the boat after four hours and the tour continued all along Lake Como. It was a really nice, beautiful, long ride. I think it took about two hours and the boat docked in Como City. But anyway, on the way, the tour guides pointed out all the big celebrity homes. Of course, George Clooney, our beloved George Clooney house is over there on the left and he didn't invite us in for lunch. Can you believe that? But anyhow, the nerve of him and so does Sophia Loren house, the Versace mansion and pointed out several. So that day was a really incredible day. It lasted 10 hours and I was exhausted, but it was so much fun. And I actually met another girl from Australia on the bus on the way back, and I still talk to her. So that's the beauty of traveling around the world, meeting new cultures, new people and new friends.

[00:20:38.060] - Katy

Yeah, beautiful. Valerie, I love Lake Como. And as you said, those villas are just so spectacular and it really is worthwhile visiting if you're in Milan for any time. And you can/it is possible to do that on your own, but you probably wouldn't be able to squeeze in a sneaky trip to Switzerland if you did that.

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[00:20:55.140] - Valerie

No, and you know what? That tour was one hundred and twenty five euros. No - one hundred and ten euros. So it came up, I think about one hundred twenty five US dollars. Incredible price for ten hours of touring Italy and Switzerland. Where else could you find that you couldn't even do it that cheap yourself. Probably.

[00:21:16.680] - Katy

Well that's true actually. And I think it's a really good point that you make, because sometimes, you know, people want to do things themselves, but sometimes it actually does pay too, if you want to see a lot, is to make use of a tour company. And there's all different types. So if you don't really like being bus tours, you can go with smaller group tours as well. So I really - I love a tour. I used to be like a backpacker that would be like, hey, I'm doing this all myself, but now I'm like, I just like someone else to do it for me.

[00:21:47.910] - Valerie

That's awesome you backpacked Katy. I mentioned my other friend to you before the recording that backpacked around Europe. And I think that would be amazing to just backpack all over Italy.

[00:21:59.100] - Katy

It was - it was when my bones were a bit younger.

[00:22:03.990] - Valerie

Yeah I hear that one. So I had sore feet on all them day trips. When I got back, I go, why didn't I do this when I was in my 20s?

[00:22:13.700] - Katy

The other thing about the tour, which I think is really, really great, is that you probably would not have tried the perche with the risotto with - that dish - you may not have tried that if you hadn't.

[00:22:23.940] - Valerie

No

[00:22:23.940] - Katy

And so there you go. And you obviously remember that very clearly. And the taste of that.

[00:22:30.300] - Valerie

Yes - I remember those two tour guides, that one was named Claudia and I can't remember them, but they were two women probably in their mid thirties and they were just so amazing, like they just made you just feel like you were just part of the gang. And we divided into two groups and we had the earphones and the little case that hangs around your neck so they could talk to you the whole day. So, yeah, it was pretty amazing.



[00:22:56.870] - Katy

Oh, wow. Lake Como is definitely an absolutely must do day trip from Milan, if you like, to want to see the lake in the mountain and it is really rather beautiful. So I can't believe it, you managed to sort out going to the Cinque Terre all by yourself. That's amazing.

[00:23:14.940] - Valerie

Yes, so Cinque Terre. So I met another gal in a different group, she was from Chicago, I believe, and she said, I'm going to have an Airbnb and Riomaggiore for three days. So if you come between those three days, I would be happy to hang out with you and host you and show you around. So I was like, yeah, well, the morning I left for Cinque Terre, the weather was great in Milan. But another story down in Cinque Terre. That's another thing I wish I would have researched a bit more is what's the weather going to be like in that particular destination on that exact day? And I could have maybe switched things around because let me tell you, they had a storm warning. It was absolutely horrible. I thought I was back in Seattle during a winter windstorm. It was pretty bad. And so she came and picked me up at the train station. I changed trains in La Spezia. Is that how you say it?

[00:24:19.290] - Katy

La Spezia, yeah.

[00:24:22.110] - Valerie

That was a cool little town too. I think. I got to walk around it just a little bit. But anyway, I changed in La Spezia and got to Riomaggiore and she can pick me up and she brought me an umbrella and she goes, I'm really sorry. Everything's closed. There's a couple restaurants open, there's a market open. But she says we're not going to be able to walk to the other four villages. And I almost burst into tears. I was like, what? I only have one day here. We can't even do anything. So we went to her Airbnb, which that was a highlight of the day because it had an incredible view with shutter windows that opened out the to the ocean there. And there's the colorful boats, all marooned there in the bay and all those boats there in bright colors and all the beautiful little apartments stacked up and the bright cheery stucco colors. Everything you see in the pictures, it's exactly what it looks like. And the sound of the waves crashing up against the shore. So she made me breakfast and then we went out, explored a little bit, even though it was pouring. I did get some pictures. She took some pictures of me. And we did get to eat in a coffee shop that was open. We had lunch and then we went and ventured up the street a little bit to a market. And by then it was time for me to go back. So disappointing about the weather. But nonetheless, I can say I've been there, I got some videos and just wet my wanderlust to want to go back there and explore the other villages because I heard they're amazing.

[00:26:06.780] - Katy

You know, Valerie, I'll tell you right now, the same thing happened to me.

[00:26:12.480] - Valerie

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Oh really? What time of the year did you go?

[00:26:15.630] - Katy

It was about September. Well, not exactly the same for the last trip that we did. We were going by train from a town called Santa Margherita Ligure, which is just down the road from there. But again, it wasn't a really stormy day. But what actually happened to us was that it was rough seas enough that all the ferries were canceled. So what that meant was all of the trains that were running were absolutely packed with people. And it was it was actually horrible, so squashy. So it's just it's such a little thing that you think, well, do I check the weather? But, yes, check the weather, especially if you're going somewhere coastal and maybe you can switch things around because I do have some quite crazy storms in the Cinque Terre I actually like and it can be very wet and wooly, as you discovered.

[00:27:07.350] - Valerie

I had no idea. I mean, I should have put two and two together because hello, I live on the coast of the Pacific Northwest and we get horrible, horrible rain and wind storms there. And I know how bad it can get and the power goes out, etc. So knowing all that I should have did my homework. So that was another lesson learned. So many lessons I learned when I went over there.

[00:27:31.470] - Katy

All right. So you also went to Venice on a day trip?

[00:27:34.860] - Valerie

Yes, I went to Venice. Same thing. The weather. It wasn't near anything like Cinque Terre, but it wasn't the best. But I guess, you know, it's the time of year. It was the third week of October when I got there, it was drizzling a little, was a little cool. But as the day went on, the sun came out and it got warm. And so it turned out to be a beautiful day. But funny story about that. Another thing about research and you - all you people listening, probably think, boy, that woman needs to do her homework!! I did do some homework, but I learned that I need to, especially when you go to a foreign country and it was my first experience. You really can't spend enough time researching. Do as much as you possibly can. So the water bus system there - not to be confused with water taxi, because water taxis, I found out, cost a lot of money to rent and you either rent them in a group or solo. So don't make that mistake because it will put a big hole in your pocketbook. But I went on the water bus while I knew about Venice and I knew there was these other stops or islands and it's all built on canals. But I guess I didn't really understand how Venice was set up or how I just said, oh, I'm going to Venice. I was going to stroll around. So the first thing I did when I got there is I was like standing out on the Grand Canal. I got off the train. I was in absolute euphoria. I could not believe what was in front of my eyes. Like, I just couldn't believe it. And you can't really even describe how it feels to you go or understand it. It's another world. It's an old world history. It's beautiful. It's I can't even put into words the thoughts that went through my head.

[00:29:24.070] - Katy

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Yeah. I have that same emotional experience with Venice, and I just my jaw just drops. It's like, how is this even real this place?

[00:29:32.320] - Valerie

I know, right? It's like, is this for real? Is this fake? But anyhow, so I got over that for a minute and then I'm like, oh, I got all excited. And I'm like, I went over to the booth for the waterbus and hopped on the waterbus and didn't spend any time at the Grand Canal. And I heard you - in your group and through the grapevine that St. Mark's Square is the place to be. So that's the first place I headed. So I'm just taking my time strolling around there, looking at all the shops, drinking coffee, eating a Cannoli and all the good stuff. And time was ticking away. I got there at nine a.m. and my train to Milano left at 5:00 p.m. and before I knew it, it was 2 o'clock. And I was sitting there eating lunch, a Caesar salad on the water, looking out at the canal. And the waiter came over and he was asking me how I like my trip so far, blah, blah, blah, blah. And am I going to see the other spots in Venice? And I go, Yeah, but I said, I don't really understand how this works, like I see this boat going. But does he stop at all of. Yes, yes, yes. He goes, well, what time are you leaving? I said 5. He goes you've got lots more to see. You better hop back on that bus. I was like oh boy and then I start getting stressed out. So I ran over to the back over to the waterbus counter a little stand and said, hey, I need a ticket. And this is how much time I have, you know where else can I go? And she goes, Wow, you should go check out Lido I said, OK, great. So I went to Lido and I got off the bus, the waterbus, and I started strolling and I was like, oh my goodness, this does not look like Venice. This looks like a beach town in California.

[00:31:18.460] - Katy

Exactly. But that's - you know good on you Valerie, because that's an adventure. And people often don't know that Venice has beaches, but you found out! In one day.

[00:31:28.060] - Valerie

Yeah. And so I walked straight to the beach. The beach was at the end of the island and it was just gorgeous, big heaps of brown sand and I thought I was on Coronado Island. To me that's what it looked like in San Diego. And there was kids playing in the sand and there was a little beach cafe and the music was playing. And so I didn't have a lot of time, but I had I ordered something to drink and sat there and took in the beach and went down the beach and got some shells. That's another thing. Don't forget to take home some treasures. I took home shells from that beach.

[00:32:06.010] - Katy

You've just got to be careful of those, though, because in some places it's actually against the law to do that.

[00:32:12.580] - Valerie

Is it? Oh, I didn't see a sign, but you're probably right. I didn't know that. I didn't take very many I took like three. And then I took some rocks off the lake in Lake Como. Is that against the law too?

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[00:32:27.670] - Katy

It's really interesting, though, because I think some of the things that - this is again a cultural thing and it comes down to research right? Is that some of the places, particularly down south, there's some really interesting mosaics and things that wash up and like they can actually be like thousands of years old. So that's why they have these rules.

[00:32:46.310] - Valerie

Well, thanks for educating me. So next time I won't take any shells because I don't want to end up in the Italian jail.

[00:32:54.970] - Katy

I don't think that would happen.

[00:32:56.560] - Valerie

It's funny that you brought that up, though, because it triggered my memory about something in Milan. Like you're saying, research the culture. What's OK there and what isn't? I was taking pictures at the train station and I just took a picture of the Metro sign and the Carabinieri, which is Italian police, or National Guard.

[00:33:16.200] - Katy

The Carabinieri yep.

[00:33:17.530] - Valerie

Yes, he came over and he went, no, no, no. And he pointed his finger at me. I turned white as a ghost and I got scared. I was like, oh my goodness. And he was like 'no taking pictures of the sign'. I was like, OK, OK. I didn't know.

[00:33:33.180] - Katy

I'm not sure about that one.

[00:33:34.390] - Valerie

Yeah, I don't know. He told me no.

[00:33:37.290] - Katy

Oh my goodness.

[00:33:38.040] - Valerie

I threw my phone away, but yeah. So Venice was amazing. And that's basically most of what I saw. I saw Lido, I saw St. Mark's Square and then when I went back I still had some time to tour the Grand Canal, but not very much. So I was disappointed in myself that I did not do that from the get go. So, yeah, but it was it was just such an amazing... And the Rialto Bridge, you have to have a picture on the Rialto Bridge.

[00:34:07.830] - Katy

Venice is stunning and you can really spend days and weeks there actually just exploring. So I and I think that's true of anywhere, really. You can really on a day you can just scratch the surface. But I'm really proud of you that you go to the Lido because it's an experience that some people don't have. And what a great suggestion from just talking to someone and finding out a suggestion. But again, I have to say, you can do a lot of research on the Vaporetto, which is the waterbus there. But they don't make it easy. I've got to be honest with you, it's not the easiest thing to figure out now.

[00:34:41.100] - Valerie

No, it's not, because I did look up their website and all the problems I encountered with that, I would have really never found that out from their website. And then there was the language barrier. So this has like really taught me that when I go to another country, I need to really try hard to learn more of the language, because in the end you lose out on things because of the translation and not understanding things. And that's what happened in Venice.

[00:35:11.300] - Katy

Yeah.

[00:35:11.850] - Valerie

I missed out on seeing more of it because I didn't understand how it worked. And then when I tried to talk to people, it didn't come across.

[00:35:19.290] - Katy

Look, and it's really just such great learning. I love this conversation Valerie because you've gone in with such an open mind and you've also - it was a challenge for you. When we - the people that were in the group and that saw you, we knew that it wasn't the easiest thing for you to do. And you got in and you did it. But I love that you've, like, taken all these things on board and you've really got them and you've learned. It's so great to hear. Is there any other learnings or things that you that you learned?

[00:35:47.820] - Valerie

The one other thing is when you order coffee in Italy, you know, they're known for their delicious coffee. If you say coffee, like if you're just meaning drink coffee, you're going to get espresso. I learned that lesson, too. There was a little coffee shop right down from my hotel in Milano. Every morning I went there and got a coffee and the fellow that owned it actually was from Egypt. It was another surprise to me, I think, surprising me and Milan. A lot of the businesses were owned from people from Middle Eastern countries. I was surprised by that, but quite a few. Yeah. And so that was really cool to get their perspective on things. So that was one thing. And then one big, huge tip. This was the thing that led to me having a huge meltdown the day I got there. So of course, I had been on the airplane for twenty four hours without sleep. I had a stopover at Charles de Gaulle in Paris and then into Milan. And anyways, when I got to the airport, that experience was fine. I took the train from Malpensa into Milano Central. So I remember asking in the group about international phone service and

all that kind of stuff. And a lot of people chimed in and said that their particular carrier had international service and it was really great. But if your carrier does not offer that which mine did not, and they said you can purchase a TIM card instead of a SIM card, and they said you can get it down in the bottom floor of the Milano Central Train Station. So my main goal when I got there was to try to find my hotel and I was depending on this SIM card business with the SIM card to work. So I went right down there and asked the guy if I could buy one and he said sure, and he sold it to me. And then I said, well, aren't you going to put it in for me? Because I had no clue how to do it. And he said "no, I'm not going to do that. I can't". I said "what?" I said "well, I don't have a tool". First of all. I mean, I know where it comes out. I shouldn't say I didn't know how to do it, but it wasn't the easiest thing in the world. Like, you have to have the right tool to open it. So I couldn't get it open and by then, I was in tears because I was like, how am I going to find my hotel now? Because my Internet wouldn't work. So I went back up to the first floor and I started scouring the crowd, trying to, you know, maybe find somebody that looked American. I don't know or, you know, that spoke English. And I stepped outside and there was a podium there for busses going back to the airport. So I'm like, that guy has to speak English because all these people are coming here, you know, to reserve a bus. So I went over there, said, hey, you know, "I'm lost and I'm trying to find my hotel. I just got here, my internet... Do you speak English?" "Yes, I do." I said, "Oh, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Can you tell me where so-and-so hotel is?" And he said, yeah, it's just five minutes this way. Turn right." When I first looked up the door of the train station instead of the streets running crossways are parallel to each other. It looked like a big fan, like all these streets, like, you know, like the sun. I'm just all these legs off at the train station. I'm like, I have no clue where to go. So luckily for that, because I don't know. Who knows. I might have been looking for - I couldn't even call the hotel. Yeah. That was a pretty traumatic experience.

[00:39:35.000] - Katy

Yeah, I can understand that. Yeah I'm one of those people that needs to be connected. So I actually travel with a portable wireless device that just goes on straight away as soon as I get into a foreign zone.

[00:39:50.240] - Valerie

Is that called SkyRoam?

[00:39:50.240] - Katy

Yes. That's the SkyRoam. I've actually got a full article on getting connected in Italy, which I think is really worthwhile looking into because there's pros and cons of getting the TIM card as well, because I personally don't like taking it out of my phone because, you know, a lot of the security things on your phone now are actually tied to your phone number. So what my bank. The other option is to take if you've got a spare phone like an old one and that's another one, you can just put the TIM one in. But, yeah, I think when you're used to being connected and you're used to knowing that you can just hit Google Maps and everything's going to be magically fine, then it can really be a little bit confusing. You know, Valerie, I'm just so

impressed. You had all these challenges and you just overcame them, but was there one place in your trip that you just absolutely loved and it made your heart skip a beat.

[00:40:41.930] - Valerie

It's hard to pick one. They all made my heart skip for different reasons. I definitely fell in love with Milan. Like you said to some people, that's not the most popular spot. But I definitely fell in love with it. I want to go back there. Venice, for sure. As I mentioned. That made my heart skip a beat and probably Cinque Terre would have more so if the weather had been better not to say it didn't at all, but I would say top of the list would be Venice and Milan, followed by Bellagio. Bellagio is dreamy.

[00:41:16.610] - Katy

Yeah, wonderful. And is there, apart from all those places. Is there somewhere that you're looking forward to visiting in Italy when we can.

[00:41:24.680] - Valerie

I'm so I in your group, I have heard a lot. People seem to really just rave and favor like Naples and Florence and the Amalfi Coast. I've heard so much about the Amalfi Coast and Sicily. So I think next time I go back, I'm going to try and stay three weeks or a month. Hopefully my family can go too and hit a little bit more in the north. I want to see the Dolomites and then I want to head to the south and see Sicily and Amalfi Coast and oh, and it would be great to see Rome too.

[00:42:01.940] - Katy

But then when you start planning these trips you go 'I haven't got enough time., damn it!

[00:42:05.660] - Valerie

Yeah. Yeah. You've probably been to like everywhere in Italy pretty much. Haven't you taken over thirty trips?

[00:42:14.240] - Katy

Not yet. I haven't been everywhere yet. Again I'm still working on it. I'm still working.

[00:42:18.770] - Valerie

You're working on it though. But you've been to a lot. I'm in your group almost every day and it's amazing the things that you share and where you've been. It's pretty cool.

[00:42:29.750] - Katy

Now Valerie I really appreciate you spending the time to tell us, as a first time and a solo traveler to Italy what your experiences were. And if people would like to stay in touch with you and your blog, how can they do that?

[00:42:41.540] - Valerie

OK, so my blog, as I mentioned, is for midlife women who love traveling and also like fashion. It's that [www.mapleleopard.com](http://www.mapleleopard.com) I'm Canadian, so that's where the Maple part comes from. Also, if you would like to follow me on Instagram, all my social channels are at @mapleleopard. It's all one word in small case. m-a-p-l-e-l-e-o-p-a-r-d. So if you go on Twitter, Pinterest Facebook, actually on Facebook, it's a little different, it's maple leopard travel blog, but everywhere else it's Maple Leopard and I post, I try to post once a week on my blog, but sometimes it's every other week. But I do post more often on Instagram and share, you know, my top travel tips. And I have been learning photography. I think I'm pretty decent at it. So if you want to check out some amazing views around the United States and Canada, where I'm from on the west coast of Canada and now in Italy and Switzerland, you can go look there and get inspired to travel to those places. Oh, and also I'm starting hopefully when travel gets better. Right now, it's not really a high priority, but I hope to start offering trip planning services. So that's one of the projects that I'm working on.

[00:44:09.970] - Katy

Fantastic. Valerie's got some really fun photos of Milan and yeah, it's all very fashion forward. So if you're into that type of thing, go check it out at maple leopard. And Grazie. Thank you, Valerie. Thank you for joining us and sharing your adventures.

[00:44:26.470] - Valerie

Grazie! Thank you for having me. Katy. I really appreciate it and honored and loved talking with you about Italy. Ciao

[00:44:33.640] - Katy

Ciao. Valerie, thank you.

[00:44:37.840] - Katy

I always think it's great to hear how others go about organizing their travels. It usually sparks new ideas and maybe a different way of looking at things. As many of you know, Italy is like a second home to me. So I may miss the things that are intriguing or challenging for a first time visitor, and I love that Valerie shared them with us. I also love Valerie's approach to choosing a base and taking day trips either side of exploring a city. There's no doubt she really learned a lot about Milan during her stay and really got immersed in the city. It is such an amazing place and it's really worth spending a little bit of time in.

[00:45:13.090] - Katy

And sometimes I think because it is good to be caught up in what is pretty and maybe cute about Italy. And the reality is that many, if not most Italians live in modern cities, in cities like ours. Except, of course, there's always thousands of years of history right in front of their eyes. Milan is Italy's biggest city. It's fast, fresh and modern, and it's lots of fun. And I really encourage people to go there with an open eye and just take it all in. Just like Valerie did. What I also learned from Valerie is to always be curious and go with the flow. That way she discovered the Venice Lido and the wonderful Milan antique market, which I highly recommend if you are there at the right time. If she had followed a detailed plan, she would

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have missed those spots that were highlights for her for her trip. Now, if you'd like to follow Valerie's adventures around the world, we put her details in the trip notes at [untolditaly.com/66](https://untolditaly.com/66) for episode 66, as well as a link to our episode on Milan. Because I cannot stop raving about that city. We would love to hear from you if you would be happy to share your trip to Italy with your partner, as a family, with girlfriends or however you travel, you don't need any special media training. We literally just have a chat online and then our wonderful audio team works their magic to create the episode. Reach out to us at [ciao@untolditaly.com](mailto:ciao@untolditaly.com) if you'd like to be a guest on the show. We can't wait to hear from you. That's all for this week as this episode is going live on Good Friday, I wish you all a Buona Pasqua. Happy Easter. It's an important holiday in Italy with lots of food, family and chocolate. Sadly, Italy is under lockdown for the second year in a row. But I know spring is around the corner and there's hopefully happier days ahead. So thanks for listening to Untold Italy this week. If you enjoyed today's show, we'd love it if you left a rating or review - that helps others find us and keep dreaming of Italy 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 and make sure to subscribe to Untold Italy on your favorite podcast app, so you were notified as soon as we release the next episode. Ciao for now.

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