

# Untold Italy Episode 68 - The inside scoop on making a move to Italy

[00:00:00.150] - Katy

This is the Untold Italy travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 68.

[00:00:12.130] - Josie

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

[00:00:15.220] - Katy

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

[00:00:19.030] - 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.

[00:00:27.100] - Katy

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

[00:00:35.950] - Josie

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

[00:00:43.030] - Katy

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

[00:00:46.120] - Josie

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

[00:01:00.090] - Katy

Ciao, everyone Katy here with another exciting episode of Untold Italy, and can I say that it's such a pleasure and honor to be here with you each week as you dream of all things Italian and La Dolce Vita. Now, I don't know about you, but one thing I find so interesting is how my Italian dreams have evolved over time. You see, one minute we're planning a trip to Rome or a week on the Italian lakes and then somehow during those visits, my hubby and I are strolling down a street in Lucca, checking out the real estate boards or having a cheeky browse online for properties to rent in Ortygia, Sicily. For some people, the evolution of these dreams is super fast. They have one taste of the Italian lifestyle and are determined to have a long term experience for themselves. Others are drawn to Italy by their family background or their studies, and others visit many times and find themselves drawn to a particular place.

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However it happens, it seems many of us not only dream of traveling to Italy, but also living there. Earlier this year, we spoke to Nikki Taylor about buying property in Italy and more recently, Michelle Damiani, who is living in Spello in Umbria. Both those episodes were so popular that when I heard about our next guest, I just knew I needed to introduce her to you. Thea Duncan was born in Trinidad and Tobago and was raised in Miami, Florida, in the US. But just like many of us found herself called to Italy. After some adventures during a semester abroad near Rome in 2003, she found herself studying and then working in Milan and decided to stay. Now married to an Italian, together, they have a son, and Thea runs an online business, helping people all around the world realize their dreams of living in Italy. What a wonderful job! Today Thea is going to share some of the things she's learned along the way about making a move to Italy go smoothly. I can imagine with the visas, language and cultural differences, she's learned a thing or two. So without further ado, let's welcome her onto the show.

[00:03:01.950] - Katy

Benvenuta Thea! Ciao and welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

[00:03:06.270] - Thea

Hello, thank you so much for having me here!

[00:03:11.070] - Katy

Thea, we are so glad you joined us from Milan, one of my favorite cities in the entire world. I can't wait to return there. I've been telling our listeners a little bit about you and how you came to be living in Italy, and this is a dream for so many of us. So I am sure they would love to hear from you how you found yourself a resident in one of the world's fashion capitals.

[00:03:30.990] - Thea

Well, it's a long story. And if I start to be a little too long winded, just go ahead and tell me.

[00:03:36.890] - Katy

No - we love these stories.

[00:03:39.150] - Thea

Like so many people love brought me to Italy. It was way back in 2001/2002, that I had like a little Italian boyfriend in university back in Miami. And when he finished his exchange program at the University of Miami, he said Thea, come to Italy with me. Right?

[00:04:01.910] - Katy

Right!

[00:04:02.870] - Thea

And at that point in time, I had been studying, I grew up in Miami and Miami has such a huge hispanic Spanish influence, so I'm going to study abroad in Spain. I was like, but since you insist, I'll do a semester in Italy as well. And I ended up doing a semester in Italy and I

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basically, absolutely fell in love with it. And I said, this is the country that I want to live in. And I was like, I have to come back. He and I broke up, but I was like, Italy, I'm coming back. So that's how I ended up here. So that was back - I did the study abroad in 2002. I went and I spent a few months in Pescara, which is where he's from, and I did like five months in L'Aquila, which is about an hour outside of Rome. And when that program was all done, I went back to the States and like I said, I was thoroughly in love with Italy and I was like, I need to get back. So I got back a few years later, thanks to a scholarship from Rotary International, and I got the opportunity to pursue my master's degree at Bocconi University, which- Bocconi is considered the best business school in Italy. So it was an honor and a pleasure. I was very fortunate. And yeah, I did my master's degree here, still completely in love with Italy. And so I ended up working with some really, really, really great companies. I worked in the corporate communications department of Gucci. I worked for Loro Piana. Yeah. Like I got so blessed. So, so, so blessed. And that's how it ended up in Milan and obviously loving it because I'm still here. I'm not in fashion anymore and realizing that while I like pretty things, it wasn't fulfilling for me. And so right now I am working on helping people move to Italy and realizing their dream of living in Italy. I realized with all the people that like texted me and wrote me on social media that it's something that so many people want to do, but they're afraid or they are scared. And it's been probably the most fulfilling thing that I've done thus far, just letting people and giving people a hand and making that dream come true.

[00:06:25.600] - Katy

Wow. And you have a family. You've picked yourself up an Italian husband.

[00:06:31.430] - Thea

Exactly. Yeah. So years later, I met my husband. I actually moved back to the States. And I like to say that that's one of the things that when you move to another country, you kind of have to figure out how you're going to do the visa process. That's one of the hardest things, because let's say I wasn't smart enough or I didn't know to, like, seek out assistance back then. And so since I got a master's degree here, I could have had my student visa converted into a work visa. But at that point in time, I didn't know it. What happens with Italy - they have quotas and when the quotas are full, they're full. But if you get an upper-level degree or something like that, you can get it converted without the quotas. And I basically waited too long to talk to an immigration lawyer. They give you two years afterwards. And I found out like maybe two years and a month.

[00:07:30.760] - Katy

No!! That's terrible!

[00:07:30.760] - Thea

I know. So I moved back to the States and I started working in the States and I got employed with another company, obviously in the States. But they were bringing me back to Italy often because, like I said, I'm in love with Italy. Right? And that's when after I got hired with that company that I met my husband and we dated for a few years and now we're married and we

have a little boy who is almost three. And so that's how it ended up here in Milan and now permanently.

[00:08:03.650] - Katy

That's so wonderful. I've got to be honest, I never tire of stories like yours, they're so inspiring. But I think like you just mentioned the thing about most dreams is that you can kind of get started and then be able to pick yourself up after you come across some of these inevitable obstacles that come your way. And sounds like the visa was the first thing. Oh, my goodness.

[00:08:24.320] - Thea

Yeah.

[00:08:24.710] - Katy

And it's kind of interesting because I have to tell my kids - they don't understand what a visa is like, why would they? They're like, why can't we just go mum?

[00:08:32.570] - Thea

I actually get a lot of Americans that kind of think that, too. I don't know why. And I'm like, yeah, well, you know, it's really, really hard to move to the United States, actually. It's actually harder to move to the United States, I think, than it is to move to Italy. So, yeah, I definitely think the visa thing, is one of the most difficult things to figure out. But it's definitely figure-out-able.

[00:08:55.010] - Katy

Absolutely, and they have, I mean it changes all the time, and I think what I've noticed recently is they've got a few new ones coming up. So it's good to be on top of these things because I saw there was one investment, one or that that they've recently announced.

[00:09:09.560] - Thea

Yeah, they have a few different visas and they change it all the time, which is why definitely you need to like, stick it out and like do your homework and do your research because that's the way you figure out what you want to do.

[00:09:20.720] - Katy

Absolutely. So apart from the visas, what other obstacles did you come across when you were moving?

[00:09:28.610] - Thea

Well, I have to say, one of the other super big things for me was just figuring out the whole rental contracts and kind of just even just looking for a house. Right. At least because I'm American and you're coming from the States, you can hire someone and say, please find me a house. But that doesn't happen in Italy like it doesn't. You have to do a lot of the physical legwork and looking for wherever it is you decide to end up. So that was just a lot of work in

itself. And a lot of the real estate agents didn't end up like following up with me, you know, so like you'd call and like you wouldn't get an e-mail. Like, they don't really do e-mails.

[00:10:16.170] - Katy

I know.

[00:10:17.120] - Thea

So you have to learn that, OK, I'm looking for apartments, whether it's to purchase or whether it's to rent, I have to put in the physical work of, like, literally almost like walking the streets. When my husband and I found the house that we're living in now, I've been looking at listings and all that kind of stuff online. But ultimately, one day we just said, OK, we're going to get in the car. And we drove every single block basically in the neighborhood that we wanted to live. And we took out all the rental apartment signs that we saw. And because my husband can be fairly - he's a project manager by profession and by just like mental ability is like that's how his brain works. Like he did an Excel file sheet and he wrote down, OK, like these are all the houses, these were their different criteria, this is who I contacted, this is a reply to me, this is who we followed up with... I don't do that people! But he does. But I had to get into that mindset in that mind-frame that, OK, I want something and I'm going to get it because I'm going to get it and I have to like do that. I also say that because Italy is such a country of relations and relationships, if you're looking for a house, you definitely want to tell people, anybody you know say, hey, I'm looking for a house, do you know anybody? Like some of the apartments I found here was just because, like I told a colleague that I was looking for a house and they were like, oh, yeah, my friend has a house. And maybe it's not even listed anywhere because sometimes they don't list it or because it's an aunt or an uncle and they're like "well, if I rent it, it's fine and if I don't, it's fine". And then I found a few apartments that way, too. So that's like my next tip.

[00:12:03.920] - Katy

Oh, my goodness, that is crazy. I mean, the thing is, I think it's it's hard for people who live in, say, the US or Australia or the UK to understand, but like online is really not as advanced in this respect as it is in our countries at all. And then that's true for travel and for anything. So, you can't expect to find what you're looking for online a lot of the time because it's just not there.

[00:12:31.790] - Thea

Yeah, it's not there. I guess it's just Italy, just not hip on the Internet so much. And sometimes I'll be talking to people and I'm like, how is it that the world doesn't know about you because the world needs to know about you, but it's just something they just don't do yet. Maybe with the pandemic, I think that's changing. But for now.

[00:12:50.780] - Katy

Yeah, that's a cultural difference isn't it? It's a really big cultural difference. And like you said, it's who you know and those personal relationships that are going to propel forward in all of those things. I know Liv, one of the other guests on our podcast. She's moved to Piedmont and

she had some similar stories about finding places to live and also working out the legal side of staying in Italy. I'm sure you would also need to know a little bit of Italian. Does that help?

[00:13:21.350] - Thea

I mean, I was blessed because I grew up in Miami. I spoke Spanish. My parents told me, you live in Miami. You should learn this language. Right? And so when I moved to Italy, I moved to a teeny, tiny little town because L'Aquila was teeny tiny back in 2002. Like, literally everybody, they were like, "oh, you're the black girl from Miami". Complete strangers. People I did not know. But because it had such a kind of like a small feeling that people knew about me, even though I didn't know about them. But the blessing of living in such a small place was that it forced me to speak Italian. Right? So I didn't know - I had taken a semester of Italian at that point in time, but it was just a semester. And so I moved to Italy and I continued to take Italian while I was there. But being in a small town, I was forced to say all the little Italian words that I knew. And I think, when it's like swim or sink. Right? And it definitely helped me learn the language and it accelerated my learning process of it. But yeah, especially if you're living in any of the smaller towns or any of the smaller cities where you don't have this big influx of tourists or travelers, you're going to want to learn the language, because if not, you won't be able to communicate.

[00:14:48.600] - Katy

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I guess there's probably some larger expat communities in the bigger cities that you can connect with, but I think, if you're wanting to move somewhere, then that's part of it. Unless you're a bit like- my husband is quite a solitary person. But I mean, unless you really don't need to connect with people. I mean, there are people that are definitely like that. Luckily he speaks Italian. I'm working on mine. And I guess the language, like you mentioned, if you were in the smaller place, that would be a consideration. If you were living in Rome, you could probably get by with pretty much English, right? but then it would really determine where you live. And I think finding out where to stay, that would be - not just the house, but in terms of the region - would be quite a complicated thing to work out.

[00:15:36.000] - Thea

Right. I think in the imagination of people. Like people, imagine Italy, like southern Italy. Right? Especially because so many of the people that traveled outside of Italy are from southern Italy. Right. And once you spent as much time as I've spent in Italy and I know you have spent in Italy, you realize that each region is so different. Each region - and that's one of the things that makes Italy so phenomenal and so great, because, like really from village to village, it can be a completely different story. And so when you're deciding where you want to live in Italy, I always tell people first you have to think of, OK, what sort of lifestyle do I want to live? Do I want to live in a big city? Do I want to live in a smaller town? Do I want it to be warm? Do I want it to be cold? Do I want to have to drive a car or do I want to have to just be able to walk down the street and get my groceries? Like these are all things you have to be thinking about and taking into consideration when you're deciding where you're going to live, because it's going to influence where you ultimately end up like. And then talking about the

regions, the personality of each region changes dramatically. So I have a class and I have students and we've been doing a webinar series where they get to see the experiences and hear what other people in different parts of Italy are like. One of the people I interviewed, Annie, who opened up a bakery in Friuli Venezia Giulia I think it's awesome, right? She is like "people work 60 hours a week" and I'm like nobody moved to Italy to work 60 hours a week.

[00:17:23.190] - Katy

No!

[00:17:24.510] - Thea

But then I was talking to another woman for the same video series, and she's in Molise and she's like in Molise everybody is like piano, piano, piano, piano, piano, piano, which means slowly, slowly, right? And slowly, slowly. It's not something you're going to hear anybody tell you in Milan because Milanese go, go, go, go, go. But at the same time, I love it because I get an international feel, I get sushi, I get hamburgers, all that stuff. Because when you live, at least for me, here this long, you kind of want that. But I still get my butcher that knows my name. Like today my husband called up the bakery and said, hey, will you put aside like two loaves of bread for me? I can't call up my bakery in the States and say, you know, put bread aside for me. And so even in Milan, that's like a big city. I love the fact that it's still Italy and you have these emotional and personal connections with people here that I think it's just harder to do in other parts of the world.

[00:18:30.120] - Katy

Yeah, I tend to agree, but it's like what you're saying about the cities is well, is so true. I mean, even we did one really big trip in Italy that went for six weeks and by the end of it, it was like where's the burger? And I love Italian food. I love it. And everyone knows I love it. And I'm like the queen of the food tour, and everything. But it's just... we have a lot of Asian food in Australia, and it's really fresh and kind of light. And so I was like "I want some noodles - not pasta!". So it's a really important thing and you might think "I can live without it" and it might take a little bit of trial and error as well. But it's good to know these things up front, I think.

[00:19:12.370] - Thea

Yeah. Yeah, I think so. I was just thinking about one other thing. Oh, this is a super, super important thing. I think people should take into consideration when they're moving to Italy is what they're going to be doing to make a living. Right. It's huge. And I think it's probably, besides getting where you're going to be living. I think it's either on par or if not more important. The Italian job market.. well, of course, if you're going to retire, if you're going to retire in Italy, it's like the best thing in the entire world. The cost of living in some parts of the country is so affordable. I say once you figure it out, whether you want sun or hiking or beaches or whatever, you can just pick wherever and then you're done. Right. If you're thinking about moving to Italy in a working age, then this is like super big deal. The unemployment rate in Italy changes dramatically depending on where you are. So Friuli Venezia Giulia has an unemployment rate of about three point five percent, and that's like

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last quarter's numbers. Even in the midst of the pandemic, Milan has an unemployment rate of about five to six percent. If you're going to Calabria, the unemployment rate is at 20 percent. And so if you're looking for a job and you want to be the kind of like nine to five employee situation, you have to really think about what sort of job opportunities are available to me in this particular area. And then also what skills do I have to offer that's going to give me a competitive advantage in the job market that I'm trying to insert myself into. And this is where, like speaking, the language is going to be super important as well, because I was very blessed to have been offered some incredible job opportunities here. But it was because I spoke the language because my master's degree was taught in Italian. I also speak English really well I think.

[00:21:22.060] - Katy  
It's OK.

[00:21:24.270] - Thea  
You know? And I had gotten a good degree at this point in time. So I always got positions where I was working as kind of like the bridge between Italy and somewhere either in the United States or the UK or something like that. So they were like, OK, you understand me? And you can also help me work with these international partners that we have to deal with. So if you're planning on coming here to work, like, think about that. I like to say fortunately in this World Wide Web world that we live in, there's ways around that. So if you are freelancing, like I have a really good friend who is a freelance photographer from Australia, actually. And she does. Yes, she does weddings here when we had weddings going on. And she also does copywriting and all that kind of stuff as well. Or if you're in any kind of like online business, then there's ways you can work around it, but definitely think, "OK, what am I going to do for a living? How am I going to do this and how am I going to make that work for where it is I'm planning on living."

[00:22:34.450] - Katy  
Yeah. And I think there's a level of complexity that goes with that is that. Even if you want to do an online business then, where are you going to base your business in terms of paying tax? And that has implications for your access to services like health care and education.

[00:22:49.960] - Thea  
Exactly. Exactly. So the whole tax dynamic, which I think most people know, taxes in Italy are pretty high. I like to say that I think the public services in Italy are phenomenal. But I come from the American mindset where they don't have health insurance - it's... I was like "I can go to the doctor and I'm not going to go bankrupt?"

[00:23:17.680] - Katy  
And it's a really good service too. It's cutting edge, especially in the north, right? It's a very modern health system.

[00:23:25.600] - Thea

Italy is ranked number two. It's kind of like tied number one. Number two, according to the World Health Organization in terms of health outcomes and the health care system. So, number two, in the world of all the countries, that's pretty awesome. The issue then becomes again, unfortunately, that the access to health care changes depending on where you are. So if you're going to be thinking about where you're going to end up then you have to take into consideration, OK, can I find a doctor that knows how to deal with whatever issues I may or may not have? And also, can I find somebody, especially if you don't speak the language? Can I find somebody who speaks English to be able to explain to me what is going on? Because mainly it's not such a big deal if you don't really understand what's going on when you're getting your tomatoes. But when you're talking about your health, it's important. So that's definitely another thing.

[00:24:26.040] - Katy

I mean, sometimes when I'm talking to the doctor, I still don't understand what they're saying in English, let alone in another language, I'm telling you.

[00:24:33.960] - Thea

I think it's good because a lot of doctors here, at least from my personal experience, they read medical reviews and all that kind of stuff. So a lot of them do tend to have a fairly basic understanding of English. But maybe you want somebody who has a little extra oomph in explaining what you're looking for, what you need. So definitely something into consideration.

[00:24:57.990] - Katy

It's really interesting, isn't it? Because like, you have this feeling, this really romantic feeling about "I'm going to move, it's going to be great, there's going to be cobbled streets, the wisteria is coming down. I'm having my aperitivo..." And these practical things - we don't want to squash people's dreams, but it's really important to understand what they are because it's unfortunately not as easy as jumping on the plane with your dog and just turning up with your suitcases.

[00:25:27.930] - Thea

I think that a lot of us who are here right now, that's basically what we did. We just showed up with our suitcases and we figured it out. That's basically because before you didn't have any other options, you either got here and you figured it out and you made a whole bunch of mistakes in the process that sometimes are really, really costly, or you get a really super expensive relocation service that's going to cost you like fifteen thousand dollars to do and they tell you what to do. But it also costs you like 15 grand.

[00:26:03.750] - Katy

And you know what as well? I have to say, having had experienced one of those relocation services for our last move to the UK. You know, there were some actually some disappointing things about that, that really - they had a kind of cookie cutter approach in terms of like where people should live. And I really did not want to live where they were suggesting. And

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then so in the end, we had to find our own place anyway. So it was quite an interesting experience going through that as well. So, yeah, I think if you can get help on this stuff and you know, a lot of like to do things ourselves anyway, now don't make like, you know?

[00:26:41.470] - Thea  
Right!

[00:26:41.470] - Katy  
We like to figure it out for ourselves and there's some sort of sense of achievement about that. So why don't you tell us a little bit about your program that you're offering?

[00:26:51.240] - Thea  
Yeah, so because like I said, so many of us when we first got here, you just need to figure that about yourself. And we made incredible, incredible amount of mistakes. We can do a whole podcast on all the mistakes.

[00:27:02.970] - Katy  
Bloopers.

[00:27:02.970] - Thea  
We can just go into all of that or the other option I have a social media following and all that kind of stuff. And people would always be like, see, I want to move to Italy, but I don't know how to do it or can you help me with it? And so one day I was like, oh my gosh - why don't I put together something, why don't I put together a course that can help people move to Italy? And I put together something that's literally jam-packed with everything I wish I had known. And more. Like when I tell you, I actually did a post on one of the little Facebook groups. And I was like, what's the one thing that you wish you had known when you went before you moved to Italy? And like two hundred and fifty responses later. Two hundred and fifty responses later!! But I literally went through all of the comments and I said, OK, this is like a recurring theme and this is something that people want to know. And I called up all my little international friends and I was like, tell me, what is it that you wanted to know, what you didn't understand when you moved here? Because I'm putting together a course that I want it to be super informative and super helpful for people so they don't have to make the mistakes that we made and so it can be as easy as feasible. So that's what I did. I put together a course. It is eight modules and I call it my eight core modules. And in those eight core modules, we talk about the cost of living because the cost of living in Milan, which is more or less on par. Milano is really, really different than the cost of living in some places in Sicily, it's just it's the whole divide, say, Italy is considered the 26th country, if you take everything together in terms of cost of living in developed countries, so it's really affordable, but then the next module is - let's talk about the Italian job market, because you have to make sure your cost of living and access to employment then matches up. We go into renting a house because they have all sorts of different rental contracts here. You have contracts here that are four plus four years, which means it's an eight year rental contract. But what is an eight

year rental contract mean in terms of your expectations and the expectations of your landlord?

[00:29:30.210] - Thea

There is a monster, a monster of a module just on buying a house. And then I have an international tax expert come in and talks about double taxation laws, the Italian taxes in general. But we also just have - there's a lot of actually incentives right now for people to move. So if you're going to some of those smaller villages and smaller towns as a retiree, they have an incredible tax incentive, which basically you pay. I think it's like five percent taxes. They have incredible incentives right now for people who are either moving back to Italy, even if you're an Italian that's coming back. And for people who are thinking about moving to Italy as a retiree, then there's like tax incentives. If you want to start a business or if you have, like, a really high net worth and all that kind of stuff. And he goes into that. And then we talk about health care and we talk about Italian bureaucracy, because that's a thing too.

[00:30:35.830] - Katy

I could do a whole podcast, just on Italian bureaucracy, probably.

[00:30:41.880] - Thea

So I'm going to say, because I think people get all worried and they get scared about moving to Italy and they're like, oh, there's all these things to do. And I like to say that once you've moved and once you've set up, once you've gotten your visa done and you have Wi-Fi connection in your house, then you do get to deal with all the beautiful strolls to go get your brioche, your Pasticcini at the bakery. Or you do get to go, like I say, I have my butchers, I have Claudia and Claudio and they're like my friends now, you know, like you do get to have your aperitivo with your friends and to go vacation for two months in the mountains and on the seaside. So it's once you've established yourself, the bureaucracy and that kind of stuff is no longer part of your day today. And it's pretty much resolved. And you can really just experience everything that Italy has to offer.

[00:31:44.310] - Katy

Having moved countries and back again twice, I can say that the bureaucracy is there wherever you go. It is anywhere. And even in your own country, you can go back and just go for goodness sake, you know, like this is why I was only away for four years what changed? But I have to say, I would have really appreciated someone to help me out with that, because what I found was it took six months to settle both there and back again, the last time that we moved. So, look, I think anything that can help people make that transition is a wonderful, wonderful thing. We don't want to harp too much on the difficulties because, like I said, it happens wherever you go. But so you think you'll move to Italy was worth it?

[00:32:26.490] - Thea

Oh, my gosh. I pinch myself sometimes when I think about how fabulous my life is here. Just one example, right? When I gave birth, I had my son. My husband had about six weeks of vacation accumulated and he literally took a month off because that's just kind of standard.

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They do give paternity leave here in Italy and people just get a lot of vacation time. So we spent a whole month together. We actually went to the Italian Alps. I am a super middle class, normal American girl that has moved to Italy and I now vacation in the Italian Alps.

[00:33:13.440] - Katy  
Stop it!

[00:33:13.440] - Thea  
And that's what we did. I literally and we we're in this absolutely gorgeous little village because we did the two weeks at a friend's house in the mountains and there were like cow bells ringing in the background. It was so affordable. It was this teeny tiny village and it was so affordable. My husband was like, it doesn't make sense that we cook. So we would just go to the restaurant in the town and they'd make polenta and like homemade strudel and all this kind of stuff. And that's what I did when I gave birth. I don't think I could have a better way of spending my first month because I didn't have to worry about food or cooking I had to do was think about my son and think about myself and these are things and these are opportunities that there's no way in a million years I would have had if I was living in the United States. There was no like one month in the Italian Alps.

[00:34:11.130] - Katy  
Well, I think we're all jealous here. I am. But that does sound absolutely gorgeous. Now I just have one more question. Is there another place (as this is really a travel podcast) is there another place in Italy that you just love to go back to every single time?

[00:34:27.130] - Thea  
Oh, my gosh, I mean, Italy is filled with so many incredible places. And like I was saying before, every little region and every little place is a little different. One of the places that I fortunately absolutely adore is actually where my husband is from. It's a little place called Tellaro, which is in Liguria, and it is considered one of the most beautiful hamlets in Italy. Dei borghi più belli d'Italia. So it's a little medieval village, not too far from the Cinque Terre where there's literally just one street to get in to. And if you want to leave, you have to make a U-turn at the piazza and go back out on that same street. It's magical, guys. And so the village is right there on the water and in the summertime they have a sagra. Sagra is considered one of the food festivals and it's La Sagra del Polpo, because it's kind of like their patron of the village, because the story goes that I think like the pirates were attacking the city, something like that, and the poor people climbed up, obviously, it's like a story. But the polpo, the octopus, climbed up the bell tower of the village and rang the bell. And so that's the story. And to honor that, the polpo, the octopus, they eat it! They have this whole food festival where literally the villagers and still today, because it's a village of only about three hundred people and they cook for days and days and days. And then people come from all the villages around it to eat the polpo and to eat the cozze ripiene, which are like the stuffed mussels. In the winter, they have what they call, let me think, but basically for Christmas time. And they still do this now. The villagers make all the candles. So about the end of November and the beginning of December, they buy all these glasses and they fill it with wax

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and they put the candle wax in it. Is that what you call it? We'll call it that right then, because they make it themselves still to this day. And then they cover the entire village with all these candles, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of candles that they cover the entire village with on the day before Christmas. And because they let them age and they make sure they put it in places where it's safe, they burn down slowly and then at, right before Christmas Day - so I guess Christmas Eve - I can speak English. They have a festival where the the Virgin Mary emerges from the water. And so they have like scuba divers that bring it from under the water and they build it into the harbor. And then it's like a big "hurrah!" when the Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus comes out of the water and it all comes to a climax with fireworks display. And so it's just like boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And I've seen it so many times and I'm getting goosebumps telling you guys this. It never gets old. It's still so beautiful.

[00:37:56.510] - Katy

Oh, my goodness. I need that octopus. I need that octopus festival in my life. I am a big fan of the Sagra, but that is next level and Christmas too. My goodness.

[00:38:10.240] - Thea

Yeah, it's so beautiful. I love it. Like I said, I've been year and year and year and I never get old of it. It's still beautiful. I'm almost crying now.

[00:38:21.130] - Katy

Well, I'm just going to put it out there when your son is old enough to appreciate it. Probably this year, maybe for the first time. That's going to be another really magical occasion for you, I'm sure. Oh Thea, thank you so much. That was just such a beautiful story. And thank you so much for sharing that invaluable information. I know that you are so passionate about helping people fulfil their dream of living in Italy. How can our listeners connect with you and learn more from you?

[00:38:48.760] - Thea

Yeah. So you guys can find me on 'Doing Italy'. It's pretty easy dot com. I'm 'Doing Italy' on Instagram. I'm 'Doing Italy' on Facebook. It's 'Doing Italy' everywhere. And so if you guys want information on moving to Italy or just about life in Milan, definitely reach out to me. I'd love to give you guys a hand. And, you know, let me help you make this - make life here yours, too. Oh, that's amazing.

[00:39:21.940] - Katy

And of course, we will put every last bit of that information into our podcast show notes. Grazie Thea, we appreciate you joining us from Milano today and sharing your tips. I know that they're really going to help so many people inch closer to making their dreams of moving to Italy a reality.

[00:39:39.460] - Thea

Thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

[00:39:43.310] - Katy

Friends, if this past year has taught us anything, it is to take the bull by the horns and not keep our dreams on hold. Sure, there are going to be challenges along the way, whether you're planning a short trip to Rome or thinking about moving to Italy. I think they are part of the journey. But I also think that if you can get some help jumping the biggest hurdles, then you'll realize your dreams sooner rather than later.

[00:40:06.500] - Katy

Now, if you're ready to take those first steps to move to Italy, then we put all the details of Thea's program 'Doing Italy' into the show notes at [untolditaly.com/68](https://untolditaly.com/68) for episode sixty eight. You'll also find a summary of our conversation and a full transcript so you can read through and digest all the great information she shared generously, at your leisure. I hope our conversation has inspired you or even piqued your interest in moving abroad. I've lived in the UK for extended periods twice in my life now, and I would say there have been two of the most transformative times of my life, and they really made me the person I am today. In the future, we would love to split our time between Australia and Italy, so I'll be staying in touch with Thea and her work for sure. If you know someone who was dreaming of Italy and moving there, make sure you share this episode, the feeling of helping others realize their long held dreams is often more thrilling than achieving your own. And it's a thrill that I get every week, so. Grazie. Thanks for listening. And we'll see you next week with that promised trip to the Aeolian Islands of Sicily. Ciao for now!