

# Untold Italy Episode 69 - Discovering Sicily's Aeolian Islands

Katy

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

Josie

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

Katy

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

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.

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.

Josie

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

Katy

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

Josie

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

Katy

Benvenuti. Ciao everyone, it's Katy and welcome once again to the podcast that takes you on a weekly escape to Bella Italia and keeps you dreaming of trips to come while we patiently wait for travel to resume. We received a lovely message on Instagram recently that I wanted to share with you all - from a listener in Denver, Colorado. "Hi, ladies. I just found your podcast and it's wonderful. I just listened to Episode 67 with Pierpaulo and laughed so much and learned so much. Thank you for all the useful info and research and sharing your experiences. It's so good to have that available for beginner mom travelers just like me. I hope to utilize all the resources whenever it is time for us to visit Italy. Thanks."

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Wow, that was such a sweet message and a shout out to everyone in Denver, Colorado, if you're listening. And yes wasn't Pierpaolo fantastic? He's so funny. And he really wants to tell you all about proper pizza from Naples. So he's coming back in a few weeks to walk us through our favorite Italian food export. Hurray! Now we've recently joined the gang on Instagram after a long break and I won't say how long that was, but it's been so much fun connecting with listeners and sharing behind the scenes clips of how I get my Italian kicks in my hometown, Melbourne, Australia. We'd love to see you all there. The handle is at @untold.italy. That's untold dot italy. Now, Instagram is a wonderful place to get lost for a few moments, isn't it? There are so many gorgeous photos of places in Italy that you add more and more places to your must see list. I know I do. Over the past month, I kept seeing pictures of some islands of Sicily pop up on my screen and I just knew I had to get our resident expert on all things Sicily, Karen Rosa, back on the show to tell us all about the wildly beautiful Aeolian Islands just across the Tyrrhenian Sea from the Amalfi Coast. Karen is an expert on Sicilian travel and she runs a company, La Rosa Works, which takes people on tours all over the island. But she's here to tell us about the Aeolian Islands. And I've got to say, prepare to add another few destinations to your list.

Katy

Benvenuta Karen. Ciao, and welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast.

Karen

Hi, how are you? I'm so happy to be back here. I'm so happy to talk about Italy.

Katy

It's so wonderful to have you on the show, I think all our listeners know how much I love Sicily and your amazing insights into that wonderful part of Italy. And, you know, because I live on an island, I somehow always feel pulled towards them. Do you feel a similar pull towards islands?

Karen

Because I live in Manhattan? Yes. There is an island mentality for sure. And Australia probably has it as big as it is. Manhattan has it as small as it is. But there is something when you live. I mean, Manhattan is so different than the rest of the United States. It's because it's this melting pot. It's like a lot of these other islands - traders, people coming and going and leaving their mark and makes for a different kind of mentality. I don't know. I like it.

Katy

Yeah, me too. So Sicily actually has several archipelagos off it's coast. Islands upon islands. I just think that's the total island mentality. And today we wanted to talk about to our audience about the Aeolian islands, which I have only seen in photos, but which look absolutely beautiful. Where exactly are they?

Karen

Well, the Aeolian islands are kind of strewn across Sicily's northeastern coast in the Tyrrhenian sea. And when I look at them, I think of like a pearl necklace tossed on the dresser after a night on the town just thrown into the sea. It's actually about six hundred and twenty square miles. And they are named the collective, the archipelago for Aeolus, the Greek God of Wind. They have a fairly decent population in total of fifteen thousand people. And if you haven't been, I thought you had been. But if you haven't been, you definitely need to put that on your list. They are, you know, they fish, they grow things, they make wine. It's a slower lifestyle. Than even the big Sicily Island and they're all volcanic, but only two are active and one in particular is very active. The islands are recognized by UNESCO as a great example of volcanic island building and they are just stunning.

Katy

Yeah, I've seen them in photos and also on Jamie Oliver. I don't know if you know him. He's a British chef he did a tour round there. And I was like, this is amazing. I have to see this place. I only thought there was one volcano. But there's two, is that right?

Karen

Well, they're all volcanoes and volcanoes are considered active if they've erupted in the last ten thousand years. So, I mean, it's a crazy definition, but two of them are still active actually, by that definition. So I've actually been to three of them. I've not been to all of them. And if all goes according to plan and my tours actually happen this fall, I have plans to go in September to visit the ones I have not visited.

Katy

So how many are there actually is in the archipelago?

Karen

Seven.

Katy

Seven?

Karen

Yeah, and that's not counting - there are little islets, a little little bitty places off the coast of some of them. So the way you get there is from Milazzo. Milazzo is a town just east of Messina on the northern coast, and people generally go there. It's a jumping off point for going to the islands, but it really has a charm of its own Milazzo. So I'm just going to encourage people. It's got a wonderful castle with a fortress and great views and a great fish market that kind of extends along this crescent shaped, tree lined lunga with trees. And it's a quite stunning, unusual for a fish market, which is usually all jammed together in a certain place. This is just extends and it's very pretty. But if it's the islands you want to visit, you're going to go to the ticket office at the port and a note about that. You can purchase your tickets online. They've got it all set up, but it's only a reservation and you still have to go to the ticket office to get

your actual ticket. So keep that in mind for your time because this is a summer destination, a warm weather destination, that's what people do at that time. So when you get there, you can't assume you're the only one going to be in the ticket office. So factor in the time and you can choose which place you want to go to or if you have more time, you can go to several of the islands, but they're all different, they're all special, and you can depart from Milazzo to get to any of them or go to them and then depart from those islands to go to the other ones. And they're all unique. They offer a real intimate look at island culture. They're small and intimate. And it's really easy to become kind of immersed in the place there because it's so naturalistic and the local people just welcome you with their warmth and hospitality. And, you know, there isn't a lot a lot to do in terms of tourism. So you go there to relax and to see the various different things, mostly food experiences and that sort of thing. Wine experiences. The food is probably based on fish. Surprise! With the local capers used liberally. I'll tell you more about those later. Capers are big agricultural product there, along with olives and grapes, and they don't really have a lot of very regional specialties. They take a lot from the from the Messina area, from the coast area. So you'll see a lot of the same kinds of things you'll get there. I mean, mostly they're eating grilled fish. They're eating the freshest, simplest foods. But of course, you're going to find pasta and eggplant and sardines and swordfish and mussels in the style of Messino. Messinese. They also have these calzone like breads stuffed with cheese and anchovies and tomatoes and just really delicious. And of course, it's the beach, it's summer. So there's always granita aplenty.

Katy

Well, I think you better tell everyone about granita because I don't know that we talked about this before. But granita is the Sicily word or it's slightly different for gelato.

Karen

Well, it is. It's a little bit different. It's basically ice. It's a mixture of fruit and ice. And they freeze it and scrape it and freeze it and scrape it and freeze it and scrape it. So it becomes like an ice that you would have on a hot day. So there's no cream or anything like that. It's just fruit and the water. I guess some people might put sugar in it, but I think it's mostly fruit. And I just actually have a new experience that I offer my guests. There's a master granita maker near Etna with one of the people that I use in part of my team. And we can go and watch them actually make the granita. And there's nothing, nothing like on a hot Sicilian day to have some granita. They often eat it with a bun, with a brioche, which sounds really heavy, but it's a perfect match. You dip the brioche into the granita and yum, it's this most satisfying, sweet, cool dessert. They eat it for breakfast.

Katy

I know! Exactly! Well it might have been actually about four years ago exactly today that I had my first proper granita in Sicily with our relatives in Messina.

Karen

Really?

Katy

So my kids thought it was the best thing. They had this big chocolate. They had the gelato version with the chocolate. But oh my goodness, it is a breakfast of champions, as we call it in Australia.

Karen

A lemon granita. Nothing better. Well, let me take you to the first island I'm going to talk about, which is Vulcano. So Vulcano is just under an hour from Milazzo. So just to give you a sense, that's the closest of the island. So if you're taking the hydrofoil, there's two ways to get there. Hydrofoil or the old Bari hydrofoil is quicker. You have to count on some time. So that's why when people say, oh, can we just go to the islands, it's a little bit more of a time investment. You park the car, you get on the boat, you have to wait. You get there. So it's not something you can just do in a morning. You know, you have to factor in a little more time than that. The island of Vulcano is named for Vulcan, the mythological Roman God of fire, and apparently he had his forge on that island. So now, since then, the word volcano comes from that. And we've used that for all mountains that spit out lava and ash. And it's still considered an active volcano. It hasn't erupted since eighteen ninety, but it is still considered by that definition of ten thousand years. It is still considered an active volcano. And when you go, one of the first things you might notice as you get off the boat is the smell of sulphur. It is on the island. Sometimes you smell it more than other times and it doesn't bother some people and other people really find it hard, but it comes from the, what they call the Fumarole fields. The Fumarole fields - they're thermal springs and vents that release gas that looks like little wispy clouds. And they do smell like sulphur. They have thermal waters on this island. And that's really why I wanted to go. And it's a rare experience, a rare opportunity to experience sitting in a mud pool, mud bath fango in Italian, which is a reason why a lot of people even dating back to the Romans have gone there. So you can bring your bathing suit. You sit for a while in a shallow pond of mud and you really give your skin a special treat. So I wasn't going to miss the chance to do that. So I went prepared. My husband was interested, too, because he thought we'd encounter a St Tropez atmosphere with beautiful people. Well, let me just say, I was happy and he was a little disappointed because sitting in the pond were mostly women tourists in various states of matronly repose. But I sat with them and it was wonderful. The mud is always like about eighty two degrees and it just left my skin feeling so, so silky.

Katy

Oh wow. I'd love to try that. That sounds amazing.

Karen

Yeah, well that's definitely one of the reasons to go there. You can't stay in there too long, even though it's stunning with the blue sky and the cliffs of copper colors, but apparently there's a little bit of mild radioactivity if you're in there for a really long amount of time. So a little goes a long way and then you go and rinse off and from there you go onto the next thing. And the next thing is walking over to the sandy black lava sandy beach, because that is something to see. And again, it is, you know, the blue water, the black sand, the cliffs from

the the hills that are copper and mineral colors, yellows. And it's really quite beautiful. It's called the Spiaggia Nera - Black Sandy Beach. The island has, just like all the islands, and you'll hear me repeat this - it's a lot of walking paths like trekking. So just find the paths with the maps or whichever way you want to go, and you can take these beautiful walks. And mostly it's about vistas. Panoramas. Gorgeous. The island itself doesn't have a great population. It's less than a thousand people live there and they have services mainly in the main port that you enter. All the typical, you know, the typical services that you would find in a in a port if you happen to arrive by yacht. That's a nice thing too. And there are those ports where they accept the yachts as well just in case. So give yourself, you know, in terms of time again, you're going to need the hour to get there. You're probably going to want to three hours to hike. You're going to want some lunch time in there. And maybe if you want to do the mud baths, you know, you're talking about a full day really to do service to the island. Some people stay there and there is a huge resort and spa. It's actually a five star property called Therasia. And needless to say, they have lots of spa treatments there. So if you you're into the whole wellness thing, it's kind of understated luxury. But you go there and you can pamper yourself in that way, which is really, really nice. For me, I like sitting in the mud pond.

Katy

I think sitting in a mud pond would just kind of wash away the past few months. You know? I could quite enjoy that.

Karen

It satisfies a child thing too - where you just want to play in the mud and slather it on your skin because that's what you were supposed to do, not because..

Katy

Do you wash it off in the sea? That's what I'm wondering.

Karen

Well, when we were there, I'll tell tales, but there was a sign that the showers were closed and there was a sign that said you shouldn't rinse off in the sea. Well, what were we supposed to do? So we kind of went behind a rock. We walked along where nobody could see us, and then we rinsed off in the sea. I mean, there was no alternative. And maybe we just hit it on a wrong day. Or maybe it hadn't officially opened for summer because I recall it was in May we were there, but anyway, they have showers and, you know, you bring your change of clothes and then go into your hiking clothes from there.

Katy

I expect you probably wouldn't want to wear your best suit when you go into the mud.

Karen

No, no. You know, and bring a bag and the whole nine yards. But it's worth it.

Katy

You know, I know everything I think would be lovely and do a bit of hiking, grab some lunch.

Karen

If you want to stay on the boat, you can continue on to the island of Lipari. Lipari is the largest of the seven islands in both size and population, and we're talking about roughly 14 square miles and something like twelve or thirteen thousand inhabitants. So the lion's share of the population of the whole archipelago is on Lipari and it is the second one that you reach, if you're going from Milazzo, the boat stops first at Vulcano, and then we'll take you to Lipari into the Marina Longa harbor. And then you take a short walk through these charming streets to get to the other harbor Marina Corta. And that's where most of the action is on Lipari. There are lots of restaurants, cafes and shops, and it's really very pleasant, very low key place with a beachy feel. And they have a nightlife there, too. I mean, there are people around. It's you know, it has tourists and it has locals. So it's a little bit more alive and active. And that is the main area on that island. Technically, it's still an active volcano, but it hasn't erupted since Roman times. So instead, it's the most touristed of the seven Islands. Apart from tourism. It had an industry years ago based on pumice, which is rock that comes out of the volcano, that has gas inside of it. The water vapor creates gas and it creates all these holes. So you pick up pumice, you'll notice that it's usually very light and spongy, like because it's got all these holes in it and it was a big industry there. Even dating back to prehistoric times, which they used it for building buildings and tools and things like that. It also has obsidian, which is volcanic glass. And that's another thing that gets emitted from volcanic eruptions. And I kind of think it has magical powers. It's rare to see these days it's not everywhere. You have to go to a specific place. Somebody gifted me a piece and I treasure it because I've never actually seen it in nature. There is an archeological museum on the island that includes a varied collection of things relating to the general history of the island, but the geology and the marine based history from six thousand years. There's an assortment of churches the Lipari town. There is the Norman Cathedral and the cloister of Saint Bartholomew, who's the island's patron saint. Everywhere in Sicily has a patron saint. And and then there's a Spanish citadel above the town from which the views are stunning. Again, views are everything. In the town there is the tourist office on the Via Vittorio Emanuele. And if you're going to do walking on any of the paths, it's best to stop there and pick up a map because signage is not always that great. And you really don't want to be lost in the middle of nowhere. Where there is not going to be a lot of people around to bail you out.

Katy

And maybe mobile coverage.

Karen

Right, right.

Katy

But I think it's a good idea, Karen, because anywhere you go in Italy to check with the tourist office before you set out on any type of trek, because sometimes the paths are closed due to

rockfalls, et cetera. So everyone, if you're planning on doing any walking that's slightly remote, make sure you get the information first.

Karen

Yeah, and most towns have some sort of tourist information center where you can / they will provide you with at least information, if not actual maps for these, especially if you're going to be trekking or walking like that. The beaches here are typically pebbly and it depends how pebbly which one you go to. But Canetto is a little town just north of Libari and it has a pebble beach but right a little bit further from there is the Spiaggia Bianca, and that's probably the island's nicest beach. Great for snorkeling and scuba diving. But sandy and beautiful that way. You know, these islands are all about crystal clear waters, greenery, flowers, coves, beaches, all these things that kind of just feed your soul, relaxing you and their happy places, full of sunsets. And you won't take a car over there unless you're planning to stay for a week in the summer. But they pretty much have bus, taxi, bicycles, scooters, different ways for you to get around the island. So that's not that's not too hard. On the north coast of that island is a winery called Tenuta Castellaro. And I can't find their wines yet in New York, but I've been to taste them several times at one of the trade tastings here over the years. And they're wonderful wines full of like salinity and freshness. And if you go and it's been on my list for a long time, I haven't made it there yet. They are right at the north part. So they do the tastings outside at sunset. Uh! On a warm evening with your glass of white wine and it's beautiful. And the only sound around is the clinking of the glasses to break the silence. It's just - all these places are kind of breathtaking, you know, one on top of the other and it gets old saying, oh, this is stunning. This is breathtaking. But it all is.

Katy

Wow, I think I could sign up for that clinking of glasses. That sounds wonderful. We should we should arrange to go there. That should be our drinking spot.

Karen

Absolutely. But there are a few others. If you want to stay overnight, there's a place that called the Odysseus Hotel and their tagline is "live your myth". Yes, I want to! Yeah. And it's close to the cathedral. So it's all very kind of central on this island, other small b&bs and guest houses. So there's plenty of places to stay if you choose to stay there.

Karen

The next island over is Salina. And they call this island the one that teaches the others how to be an island - the one with a green soul. I love that. Today it is actually taking a leadership role for all the islands to become sustainable and completely green. In today's meaning, Sicily is really on the forefront of this movement in many ways with wind, with solar, in the wine industry, they're really dedicated to becoming more sustainable. It's really very impressive for a small place. And I think it all goes back to how much they just love their land and they've always cared for it. And it's been - it's very easy to be organic there because of the climate, because of the winds. It's admirable. Salina's the second largest of the islands, and it was formed from two now extinct volcanoes, Monte Fossa delle Felci and Monte dei Porri, which

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are in the center of the island, and you can see them. And today, about twenty five hundred people live there. For me, it's like paradise. I fell in love with this island whitewashed or very colorful, small structures, mostly green landscapes on the mountainsides, intensely colored flowers. You know, that bougainvillea that's in such rich colors. And of course, the surrounding blue sea. There are grapes, ferns, olives, chestnut trees and capers. There are tourists, but fewer than the other two islands I've mentioned. And it's like a breath of fresh air. I don't know if I was a painter, I would want to spend time there. You arrive at the Port of Santa Maria Salena, and that's on the east side of the island. It takes about 90 minutes from Milazzo in the hydrofoil. And they have all the typical services in the port, you can also rent a boat for exploring the coastal areas because a lot of these islands, it's difficult to get there via any other mode of transportation. So you need a boat to circle the island and get to some of these beaches that are, you know, that are hiding there. And you can ride a scooter, too, which is kind of another fun thing. And caper farmers, you can visit caper farmers and wine makers and swim and do sea sports. I mean, you can't get fresher fish. So it's got all these, again, natural things at your disposal to do. Only a few main roads on the island and Malfa is the main town on the north central section of the island, Pollara is in the west, Leni is central, close to the south coast where Rinella is, and that's Rinella's, the second port where the boats also stop. But Malfa is really the best choice to avoid the arriving tourists at the port. And it's very small scale, but it's got everything from spas to supermarkets and shops and restaurants. But on a small scale, the busses all stop there so you can get there easily. And you're in winery country again. The Fenech winery is near there and Caravaglio, a family winery organic that's been in business only since about fifteen hundred years. And they make Malvasia wine. I'm very excited about them because I just bought two bottles of their wine that I found and I was thinking to open that on Sunday with the family. So very exciting. So Malvasia gives me a moment to talk about what is Malvasia. Malvasia is a white grape that's native to Sicily and it grows in volcanic soils and has a kind of clean mineral brightness that reflects where it is from the terroir. Its citrus at sea salt, it's wildflowers, hazelnuts. They have hazelnut trees, and they make it in both the sweet and the dry manner. So we know that the Greeks had this wine and it was very important to them because there are coins that you can see with clusters of those grapes on them and now they make it both in the sweet and the dry way. The Passito is the method that they use to to make the sweet wine where they dry the grapes on the long cane mats so that they dry and further develop the the sugars in the sun. But the sweet wine that comes out of this is not like the cloying, sweet wine that you might think of and go, Oh, I don't like sweet wines. These are clean and fresh tasting and they're just beautiful, beautiful aromatic wines. And their still wines are equally beautiful. That's what I bought. So you can taste Malvasia in the wineries, on the island, on the islands. And it's just a wonderful, wonderful grape variety. And the wine that it makes is wonderful.

Katy

Is it a bit more casual in the islands in terms of going to wineries. Can you just show up or do you need to make an appointment?

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Karen

No. At all these places you need to make an appointment. You need to call ahead because basically they're farmers.

Katy

Yeah.

Karen

You know, they don't have dedicated people to just be there waiting for you to taste the wines when you arrive. And actually, that's what makes it, I think, very special because you call and you tell them you're coming. They are going to set aside time. They're going to sit with you. They're going to talk to you about their family history and how long they've been there or the land that they've worked and how hard it or how easy it's been. You're going to learn a lot just from sitting with these people, which is why I always like to take people to wineries. It's a great way to have an inroad to the community, to the culture or to the traditions, to the history, all by sitting around sipping wine. I mean, what's wrong with that?

Katy

Who needs a museum, really?

Karen

You can learn it all just with a glass in your hand. And it's really interesting because the Sicilians, they drink and probably true with a lot of Southern Italians. It may have changed a little bit in northern Italy, but I mean, you drink when you eat. So wine, is like a food. It's not about, you know, a lot of these wineries that you hear about where you go and it's just a big drunk kind of thing. This is - it's respect for for the drink. So going east from Malfa where the island has a sort of point to it is the Capofaro. And there you have Tasca d'Almerita wine resort. I'll tell you about that a little bit. Pollara is on the other side, the western part of the island, and it's the quiet side and maybe the more romantic side where you can be on the beach and the nicest beach actually on the island that overlooks Filicudi and Alicudi the other two islands to the west. There's some old boat shelters and inside the rocks and you climb around and it's, again, very beautiful. So in addition to the grapes, I want to tell you about the capers, do you know what a caper is?

Katy

I love capers. I love them. They're the little berries. So they can sometimes be quite big as well. So you can get the baby little ones and they usually come salted or in brine don't they?.

Karen

Right. Well, that's the difference. And most people don't realize that when you eat the capers, you are actually eating the buds of the flower. You're not eating the fruit, the capers, the bud of the flower. Once it matures and grows into a fruit, you eat the bigger one that has the stem. And that's called cucunci or cucunco. And it's it's just sort of the the bigger brother of a caper. So the flavor is similar. They both get brined to get rid of the bitterness. And in

Sicily anyway, capers are often used as a substitute for salt. They generally preserve them under salt. And then you rinse them off and, you know, I throw them in everything. They're really delicious. And when you go there, they sell them avvolto, so they're shrink wrapped and you can take packages home with you. Always in the bag, always in the bag.

Katy

Best souvenir ever!

Karen

It is! The food is the best souvenir. I received a lovely package at Christmas from one of my friends over there. Still working on those, finishing those up. Spare, spare the good ones. The interesting sidebar about what makes the caper plant so special is that they don't use the seeds from the big cucunci actually replant the plant. They graft, so they only graft the good ones. They graft. So it is like genetic selection. So you always have the best caper plants. So I was kind of intrigued when I learned that because why don't they do that for all plants? I don't have the answer, so. It sounds like a good idea, right?

Katy

Absolutely.

Karen

I'm sure it's very labor intensive, too.

Katy

But those are always the best results. I think it is a little bit of labor and love putting into something. You get the best results and the best capers.

Karen

Absolutely. Malfa has the best little collection of hotels, and that's probably where you'd want to stay there's some by the port. But the Hotel Ravesi is really lovely. It's got one of those infinity pools that looks out to the sea. So when you're sitting there, you look like you're about to drop into the sea. It's all one seamless bit of piercing blue on top of piercing blue. Just get me a glass of wine and a towel.

Katy

And a few capers.

Karen

Yep. There's another hotel, Principe di Salina, which is also a beautiful, beautiful boutique hotel surrounded by vineyards. You know, none of this is hard to take.

Katy

No.

Karen

So back to Capofaro. That is a really beautiful spot right at the corner overlooking the sea and the Tasca d'Almerita resort is there Capofaro Locanda. It covers a vast area with vineyards. And right in the middle of these are these whitewashed set of buildings that contrast with the blue sea in front of it. I mean, it's just stunning and expansive views. They even have a lighthouse that looks out over the sea. It's just just beautiful. Of course, Tasca makes wonderful wines, so the rooms are not in a typical hotel kind of fashion, they're in these dotted buildings that dot the area. And I had a client once whose sole criteria was that she wanted to be able to see the sea when she lifted her head off the pillow. Got it. I found her just the right room, at Capofaro. And that was possible. She was thrilled. That's custom planning.

Katy

Absolutely, yeah! You're not going to find that on the Internet.

Karen

Three different places. I had to find her, where you lift your head and that's what you see.

Katy

I think my mum would be right into that. She's actually designed her bedroom that way at home.

Karen

Really? Wow,

Katy

I will be letting her know that little detail about your custom planning.

Karen

The photos of the room look stunning. And she said it was so I was happy that she got what she wanted. So the next island we're going to talk about is Panarea, and that is due east of Salina. Over the last fifty years, it's kind of become a secret hideout for celebrities who like just the kind of low key luxury feel to it, takes about two hours to reach it from Milazzo. But they don't care about that because they kind of come in their own yachts and hang out with cocktails in hand and billowing beachwear, walking beside the deep blue sea, I mean, I haven't been invited to join them. I'm just reporting on it. But it's an island of golf carts, no cars allowed. And mostly they just relax and get away from the big crowds. There is a town, a quaint town called San Pietro and lots of sandy beaches and a lot of steps descending steep flights of stairs to get to the beaches. They even have some of those fumarole is there. The vents that release the steam, you can rent a got so a little small boat and then you go around to the quiet little beaches. And scuba divers love this. They love Panarea. It's a good place to do that. It's just all about the simple things. It's about being in a different time or maybe a place where time just doesn't matter. Everything I've read says that it's like that. So there are

trattoria, of course, that serve food for generations. Again, a lot of the fresh fish, but a little more elegant and maybe creative to suit their guests.

Katy

So is it sort of like that secret hideaway, you know, like I guess the Greek islands. It comes to mind, that maybe the Amalfi Coast and Capri are getting this reputation for being very, very busy and the people are just wanting to just take a little bit low key and move over to these very secret islands that maybe is not so secret now, we've told everyone. Right? Well, I think I mean, Panarea is a little distant from, you know, I guess you'd call it off the beaten path - even though it's in the water, it's you know, it does take time to get there. And there isn't for the general traveler. You know, it's a pretty island. It's beautiful. But you can do that on the other islands, too. So I think the draw is not necessarily there. So it doesn't necessarily attract a lot of tourists anyway. There is a prehistoric village there where you can see some huts that came from the Cretans back in the 15th century B.C. So we know I mean, traders, traders like islands. So that's what they came there for. And but other than that, I don't think there are a whole lot of general tourists that really go there unless you want to look at the celebrities.

Katy

But you can do that elsewhere.

Karen

Right, you can do that anywhere. Why waste your vacation time doing that? There are some little islands off of that island as well. But you have to have a boat to get there and capers grow there. You sit there, have a little Malvasia, some sesame cookies, a sunset while the water gently laps at the shores. You know, it's the right tone for the island and should you go and should you not have your own yacht to sleep in the Hotel Raya, which is probably the most popular choice and it overlooks Stromboli. It even has a nightclub. You don't see that in too many.

Karen

Stromboli is small but mighty. It's only about five square miles. Only about three hundred people live there. I know someone who has a house there and it has two small villages. One is the town of Stromboli and the other one has that beautifully poetic name, Ginostra. Maybe I'm getting that from the movies. Strombolicchio is a little island off of Stromboli, and that's the most northern part of Sicily in the water. So it's Italy's most active volcano. And that brings a lot of tourists, mostly by boat at night to watch the explosions. Strombolian activity is an actual name and it means continuous explosion. Fountain-like emissions of hot molten rock. And it's been erupting for more than two thousand years. Some not sure could be double that, which doesn't seem that long to me, but it erupts about every twenty minutes. So it provides an epic light show. I mean, you're almost guaranteed to see something that you don't ordinarily see. It's sometimes called the lighthouse of the Mediterranean, and to get there is a three hour ride from Milazzo, some of the tour companies will do a dinner on the boat or something like that. But if you consider it's six hours of boat ride and then you watch the

show, you can stop and certainly go to the towns and some companies will do that as well. But you are talking about a solid day of time. Did you ever see the film Stromboli?

Katy  
I did.

Karen  
Oh, my God. With Ingrid Bergman. You know, obviously, it was filmed on location. It seemed so bleak, but in a wild kind of romantic way, you know, clearly it worked for them.

Katy  
Certainly did!

Karen  
Interestingly, Stromboli is referred to in the masculine ??? In Sicilian. And it means because he's so powerful, it means he ??? Etna on the other hand, is called mother or her majesty because she is so nurturing to the land. So it's interesting. You have the two active volcanoes, two important volcanoes, and one is the male and one is the female.

Katy  
One question, before we move on to the next island is, would you actually stay on Stromboli or is it easier/better - like it sounds like the ideal spot is Panarea, because you can see the view across the bay.

Karen  
You could stay. I mean, there are people like I said, people live there. I know mostly it's a summer house kind of thing, but I don't think you would really. There would be no real reason to stay there unless you were some sort of hiker. You can hike on the volcano. But obviously you have to do that with somebody who knows what they're doing.

Katy  
That is an adventure sport.

Karen  
Yes. And there are quite a number of them when it comes to volcanoes, you know, getting close. And it's fascinating. But you have to go with somebody who knows what they're doing.

Katy  
Sure. I think I'll stick to the wine.

Karen  
Yeah, no. I mean, I've done, you know, I've climbed around Mount Etna and various different places and it's fabulous, you know, and I've seen eruptions and it's really fascinating. Etna has been erupting for the last four weeks. And every time, you know, you just can't tear your eyes

away from the eruption. It's so incredible that this happens and it feeds us. It nourishes us. And yet it's you know, you look at that and go, oh, my God, you know, anyway, it's just fascinating.

Karen

So back on the other side, so if you're looking leaving Salina, you're going west, we find Filicudi and it was only kind of created through a volcanic event only about a million years ago. So to put that in perspective, Hawaii's Western Island is sixty five million years old. But at the eastern island is only three hundred thousand, so these volcanic movement's eruptions and the tectonic plates doing their things, either coming together or expanding or creating new lands all the time. Well, not all the time. But, you know what I mean.

Katy

In the passage of time.

Karen

In the passage of time. But I mean, you know, three hundred thousand is a far cry from sixty five million. Makes you feel very small. It's a smaller island than Stromboli. So about four square miles and in 1997 they turned most of it into a nature reserve. It kind of looks like a turtle or some people say a pregnant woman, but basically it's just beautiful. The name came from a Greek word that meant Phoenician Island. So again, traders, but it has prehistory that goes back three thousand B.C. So its traders or the traders always like islands, especially well located ones. And I guess the beauty doesn't help. It doesn't hurt either. Interesting little story. In 1971 they had about two hundred and seventy residents and the Italian police used Filicudi as a place of exile for 18 reputed bad boys and you know, and then the rest of the population left. But that that's all history and now they've come back. So there are many things to see on the island as well. But again, most of them are things of nature. So you have this wonderful Capo Graziano promontory, which is a place that you go to for the views. It's by a prehistoric, old prehistoric village right on top of Le Punte, which is the probably the nicest beach on Filicudi, but it is pebble. You have to know again where you're going. Follow the signs. But here at that Le Punte beach, if you happen to be an expert diver, they have a really cool thing, which is a submarine archeological museum. So if you're an expert diver, you can go down there and there are about nine ancient shipwrecks and loads of amphora undersea untouched. So, I mean, to me, I would love to do this, but I've never dove once, much less at an expert level.

Katy

Do you know how deep it is Karen?

Karen

I don't know. But I imagine it's some depth to have these old ships.

Katy

I do dive.

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Karen

Do you? At an expert level?

Katy

I don't think so. No, it's generally tropical island diving.

Karen

It's something I would like to do, but that really sounds very cool just to swim around all these old shipwrecks.

Katy

Yeah amazing.

Karen

The Stimpagnato Belvedere is the place you go for the sunset. So it's kind of a romantic place on the western side of the island and it overlooks Alicudi. And they say, you know, every night there's a different sunset and every one of them is just gorgeous. Again, reach it by path. And then they have some caves. This one's called the Sea Cow Cave, the Grotto del bue marino. And according to the legend, this was the home of the God Aeolus. So it's on the northwest part of the island where at one time a lot of sea lions swam and you can only get to it by sea. And then you go inside and you see the amazing reflections that the light creates on the water. It's just stunning. The photos are stunning and the sounds in the cave sound like the roar of those sea lions. So it's very evocative and beautiful. And near there, near the cave is this - invisible from the Stimpagnato Belvedere is the La Canna stack. And that's the symbol of Filicudi. It's what remains of the last volcanic eruption about forty thousand years ago. But it is the symbol and it's just something you'd want to see. So basically trekking paths up to and around, but the best place to go is the Fossa Felci, which is the peak of the island. And up there it's like a different microclimate. It's cool. Even in August, the vegetation is different. Heather grows there, giant chestnut trees, ferns. It's just a totally different feeling. It's a moderately difficult walk to get there. But once you're there, you'll be rewarded with a breathtaking view of the whole archipelago and even of Sicily. So it's worth going there. And then once you need something to refresh yourself, you can head to the Villa La Rosa, which is the place that the locals go to hang out.

Katy

Was it named after you?

Karen

No, I doubt it. But I have an interesting - just quick sidebar. Three of the people coming on my tour in the fall - I actually don't even know how they found me, but I recognized their last name as a name that's somewhere back in my family. We think we're related. And they just found me out of nowhere. And I think they're three, four, maybe four generations back. But I

think we came from the same, the same family. So that's kind of cool. We're going to have fun discovering that.

Katy

I love those things. Those serendipitous moments.

Karen

Oh my gosh, it's just so really?? Anyway.

Karen

And then the last of our archipelago is Alicudi. And that's a wild, wild place. No cars, no ATMs. You'll find just lots of steps to climb and mules. But the mules will carry your luggage should you decide to stay. So it's OK. Just very, very rustic. The only accessible beach is by the port. The others all have to be reached by a boat. It's built on an extinct volcano. It is extinct. It last erupted twenty seven thousand years ago, so it is definitely dead. And again, the name comes from a Greek word and the word is for heather, which grows on the slopes of the island. I don't know. It all sounds very wildly romantic to me.

Katy

It really does.

Karen

And historically, it was the target of pirates. So, the people who lived there built their homes on these high terraces trying to be safe, and they could only manage very simple agriculture there. So peaches became a foundation of their economy. In more recent times the island has a reputation for having witches and sorcerers and, but (and this is true, you won't get a local to talk to you about this, but it is true) - it goes to Ergot, which is a fungus a rye fungus that happens in the local grain because of the humidity there and because they didn't have a lot of agriculture, sometimes they were hungry and they ate everything they made, even if it had some bacteria growing in it. But well, they called this horned bread because sometimes there was this spear-like growth coming out of the bread, that was that bacteria the ergot. It is also that bacteria, the base element in when you make LSD.

Katy

Oh.

Karen

So, there is this whole, you know, quiet but not so quiet knowledge of these people who were kind of crazy because there was just this natural fungus that they ate because they ate what they made, they had to.

Katy

They were eating the bread.

Karen

Yes, it's an interesting story, but it's a beautifully rustic place that is far. So not that many people go there. But about 120 people live there now and they live mostly off of the fishing and the small agriculture. And there's only one restaurant on the island and you just eat whatever they're cooking that day. So it's a very, you know, you need time to go there if you want to go there. And about the time thing, I would really say that if you're going to go visit the islands, I mean, it's so hard - vacation time, you just don't have a lot. You have to do what you can. But in order to see the islands, you need more than just one day. I mean, either pick one and just go and do that island well, or if you have the luxury of time for two or three days, set that aside and just go in and immerse yourself in this very different place. Each of these islands. I mean, how different one from the other.

Katy

I think it would be nice to rent a boat with a skipper. And just if you had time and leisurely sail around, I will actually mention this to my husband who does sail, but is not really into leisurely sailing. It might convince him to change his mind. But it does sound quite amazing - just let these different landscapes almost like the Greek islands, but even, like sounds a little bit more remote even than some of those Greek islands.

Karen

Well, as I was talking about a lot of these, we all have that iconic image in our heads of Santorini, you know, with the whitewashed and the striking blue domed buildings overlooking the sea. And I would say that these islands are more rustic than that. That seems more developed. It seems more pristine in a way. Not that these aren't beautiful, but pristine. I don't know. To me, the word pristine means it's not - that it's very kind of 'curated', maybe that's the right word. You know, people live on these islands and work the islands and the tourists are actually not that important because they come there in the summertime only and they live there the rest of the year. Yeah. So it's rustic. It's beautiful. I guess there's a reason why they stay there. The other thing to keep in mind is that it is very windy there. So even in the summer months, if you are trying to get across and there's heavy, strong winds, you know, be prepared - watch your weather because sometimes the boats won't go you.

Katy

Interesting. Wow. I think a lot of people listen to this podcast to find out about these undiscovered places, obviously, they are discovered. But I think this is kind of like the ultimate, the most, maybe not the most, but one of the more secret places in Italy that most people don't really know about. And I think it's really good to shine a light on these, but not too much, because I think, as well that they need to retain a certain charm or they will, because unless really big services are developed on the islands, they probably will stay like that for a long time because like Santorini has its own airport, which is probably why it is well curated etc now. But yeah, I think if anyone's wanting a more rustic experience then this sounds absolutely beautiful.

Karen

Yeah, I mean, it's the same with all of Sicily, I mean, the way - the place is based on the small towns really, and the small town people don't necessarily go to the other towns because it's slow going on the roads. And it's just not their culture to do that because it's become such a hot destination in the recent years. I was saying to one of my colleagues over there, I said, can't they build another hotel over there? Because, you know, even when we want the rooms, they're all full. And he says, well, we're trying to resist.

Katy

Yeah, it's interesting. I mean, tourism is such a great enabler of so many things, of understanding, of sharing and learning about new cultures. And it's a really interesting balance. But it sounds like in the Aeolian Islands, they're striking the right one for them.

Karen

Yeah, I think so. I think so. I mean, they're welcoming the tourists, but as I said, it's a short season, so they welcome them, but then they go about their lives for the rest of the time. So I have thoroughly enjoyed the three islands I've visited. I can't wait to go to the more remote ones. And I have wonderful people to work with who know those islands inside and out. I have a Sommelier that I use who can do spa massages and they use the wine - the cream made out of the wine must to do the massages. I mean, it's really it's really pretty wonderful.

Katy

Wow, that is truly living the myth.

Karen

That's living the myth!

Katy

Just to borrow from the hotel.

Karen

Correct. So anyway, I hope you enjoyed hearing about this. And, you know, it's a wonderful place to put on your list for the next trip to Sicily.

Katy

Absolutely. Now, Karen, can you remind our listeners how they can discover a Sicily through your eyes? How can we stay connected with you? I am connected through the usual places. I have a website which is [larosaworks.com](http://larosaworks.com), and I am on Instagram and Facebook @LaRosaWorksSicily. I love Instagram because it's like my little museum of photos and then on LinkedIn and Twitter as well. But those are the three main ones. You can email me through my website and there's lots of information on my website about Sicily.

Katy

Yeah, I mean, what Karen doesn't know or share about Sicily is probably not worth knowing. So Grazie Karen, thank you so much for joining us.

Karen

You're welcome. You're welcome. Salute and we'll talk again.

Katy

Sunsets over Stromboli - oh, my goodness. And as predicted, I'm now planning to add all of the Aeolian Islands to my never-ending list of places to visit in Italy. If you search up images of the island, you'll find that they are the perfect Mediterranean escape. And, you know, as yet they're fairly undiscovered, because, as Karen described, a little effort is required to get there. Of course, they offer everything you expect from an island in the Med and much, much more, including those delicious capers which I could eat by the spoonful (don't tell anyone). Now, speaking of food, I think you're going to love next week's episode when we're talking about love and pasta and the love of pasta with an amazing young Italian entrepreneur who has joined forces with her Nonna to bring the pasta dishes of their village to the world. So that's all we have on Untold Italy today. We would love it if you shared our podcast with your friends and family or gave us a rating or a view that helps the people at Apple and the other podcast apps know that we have a great show and serve it up to Italy loving listeners just like you all around the world. Keep dreaming of Italy friends and Ciao for now.