

Untold Italy Episode 72 - Lake Maggiore

Katy

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 72.

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.

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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.

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

Katy

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

Katy

Ciao everyone! Katy here, and it's time for another escape to Italy and a virtual wander through the landscapes and experiences you can only have in Bella Italia. But first, a shout out to listener Crista Andersen from snowy, Alaska. Crista wrote to me telling me how much she enjoyed the show and about her love of lemons and all things Italian. She said "I just wanted to thank you again for helping me get to Italy at this point without getting on a plane." Hey, Crista, grazie, thank you so much. We are so happy that you can take this virtual trip with us to beautiful Italy and hope you enjoy this week's episode and many more to come.

Katy

Today. I've invited my friend Jo Mackay from villa specialist Bookings For You onto the show to tell us about beautiful Lake Maggiore, one of Italy's larger but lesser-known lakes that is very close to Lake Como and Milan. I first met Jo in her kitchen in the UK, where she'd organized a wonderful cooking demonstration by some of her business partners in Italy. It was such a fun day and we've stayed in touch over the years, having bonded over all things Italian. Jo is the person to reach out to if you're looking for a beautiful villa for your vacation in the Italian lakes, Puglia, Tuscany, and beyond, Jo has also spent a lot of time on the banks of Lake Maggiore. So let's hear all about that now.

Katy

Benvenuta Jo and welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Jo

Hi Katy. Thank you so much for having me.

Katy

Oh, it's so lovely to have you here, Jo. I am so looking forward to chatting about beautiful Lake Maggiore, but before we get started, I know you have a long-running love affair with Italy and the lake. Can you tell us your story and how it all started?

Jo

Yeah, of course. Actually, it's probably a fairly recent love affair with Italy in some ways. In that when I was at school, I was a typical British school student in the 80s that - we had to study French. So everything I knew up to the point of 18 was all rolled around France and studying French A level and the holidays we did as a family were to Brittany and Normandy. So actually was only in the late 90s when I went on a family trip to Tuscany, that I started my love affair with Italy. And then we stayed in a typical Tuscan farmhouse. We visited Florence, Siena, all these places that you feel like, you know, before you even get there and absolutely loved it. And then in 2003, I think it was my husband and I took our two young children to the Italian lakes and we had the most wonderful holiday spending a week on Lake Como and a week on Lake Maggiore and that's when I fell in love with Italy hook, line and sinker. I just thought it was the most beautiful area. Yeah. And haven't looked back since.

Katy

I know that feeling. Now I know most of our listeners will have heard of Lake Como and many in know Lake Garda, but I suspect not everyone knows Lake Maggiore, where exactly is this lake?

Jo

Maggiore is... How is best to describe where it is? It's kind of in-between Como and Garda in a way. It's just an hour from Milan, so it's really close to get to from Milan and actually, it falls into both Italy and into Switzerland. So the top part is actually Swiss, but the majority of it falls into Italy. It's a beautiful lake. It's only an hour from Lake Como. So if people know Lake

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Como, which most do, then it really isn't far from there. But it's quieter than Como. It's just as beautiful in my opinion. You could argue it's less dramatic. So on Lake Como, the mountains literally seem to rise from the lake, these tiny little lakeside roads running around, whereas Lake Maggiore has often slightly more room between the mountain in the lake. So you could argue the scenery is slightly less dramatic, but I think it is just as beautiful. You're less likely to hear American or British accents when you are Lake Maggiore, but yeah, and that's probably one of the things I love about it, though, if I'm honest. The fact it's slightly off the tourist track.

Katy

Yeah, it is. It is rather beautiful. I was just mentioning to Jo that I had been there in the autumn or the fall of 2017 and it was sooo beautiful. The leaves were changing color and yeah, it's just a very, very pretty quiet, peaceful place actually. I found it very, very peaceful and very beautiful. So when people are going there and it is very easy to visit from Milan because we went there just on a day drive when we were staying with some family and it was very nice. But where are the main areas that you would go to on the lake to visit?

Jo

I mean, historically, the main town on the lake is Stresa, and that's where you'd get Brits visiting back in the 18th century as part of the European tour. And Stresa is still where you'll find most tourists. It's where typically you'll get presented with a menu in English as well as in Italian. They will assume you're a tourist in Stresa. But actually, I'd much prefer heading out of that main tourist hub. Some of the towns that I like best are Cannobio, Cannero, Arona, and actually, I am biased because I own a property near to it - is Luino. Now, Luino is not a tourist town, but it's where you'll find a good local population all year round. So whatever time you visit the restaurants in Luino will always be open and the locals will always be out. And it's actually a great base to visit the whole of the lake because it's kind of halfway up the eastern side of the lake. You can easily head up to the Swiss part and visit Ascona and Locarno at the top. You can head down to Stresa at the other end of the lake and you can head across to the west to visit Cannobios, Cannero and so on. And it's a great location to visit the Borromean Islands as well, which are islands in the center of the lake that are absolutely beautiful. So to me, it's a good base, not the prettiest, you could argue, although the lakefront has been done up in the last few years, but it just has a good feel to it. You'll have an authentic stay in Luino because you're surrounded by the locals and you can go and explore everything you want to very easily.

Katy

Oh, it sounds incredible. I do like the idea- being Australian, being on this huge country/island? I love the idea of being able to just zip over to Switzerland on a whim and in fact, we did that in Como. But I forgot to take our passports. Aaah! So that's one thing. If you're going to be doing sort of like your lake hopping, you'd probably better take your passport.

Jo

Yeah, you often don't get checked, but I would think just have it in the glove compartment just in case. You never know when they decide they do want to stop your car. Normally you just get waved through when you're driving across the border. But yeah, always good to just take it in case.

Katy

I guess you can drive but are there also ferries that take you up and down the lake?

Jo

Yeah, so there's a great public boat system, so you do get some fast boats if you're literally wanting to go from one end of the lake to the other and then the average kind of slower-paced boats where you just hop on. They'll come pretty regularly every half hour or so to the main towns and then you just hop on, hop off. It's just a few euros to get from town to town. It's great value. And then, of course, you can hire your own little boat as well. So it's very easy to hire a little motorboat and just take off yourself on the lake, which is a brilliant day out. You can just park up or moor up. I don't know what the correct expression is. You climb aboard and hop off and get some lunch and then come back on your boat and sail back later. So, yeah, it's a great lifestyle.

Katy

Oh my goodness. I think I would need to get a boat on Lake Maggiore. That sounds amazing. Just get a little picnic. A little something, something.

Jo

Exactly.

Katy

Now tell me about these Borromean Islands. They sound pretty special. In fact, we never got there, but I could see them in the distance. It was quite tantalizing, actually.

Jo

So they're stunning. So there's three islands in total of the Borromean Islands for the smallest one is actually still lived on Isola Pescatori, and that is the Fisherman's Island. So if you want to eat some good fish, then that is the island to go to. And they've got some great fish restaurants there and they still have people living on the island now. But you've also got Isola Bella and Isola Madre and that's where you'll find the Borromean palaces. So you've got beautiful buildings there and some incredible gardens. The gardens are exquisite and you'll have these famous white peacocks that strut around the gardens. So, yeah, if you're into nature and flowers, they're absolutely beautiful and it's easy to catch a boat across to the islands. You can either catch a private taxi boat or you can take one of the public boats that we were just talking about. And Stresa is probably the easiest and quickest place to get across to the islands. But you'll also get to the island, some other towns as well.

Katy

They sound really nice. I love a beautiful, manicured garden. And these ones that they've got those terraces haven't they. And beautiful statues. And I think it's like an Instagram heaven there. I can just see a lot of people posing with the flowers. It's very colorful. Because the thing that's really interesting about the lakes that I find is that the climate is actually quite surprising because you would think it would be quite cool, but it's actually a little bit more Mediterranean, isn't it?

Jo

It is completely. And actually, you have plants growing on the lake that you wouldn't expect to see. So Cannero actually has a huge, big citrus festival. So they'll grow lemons and oranges, things that you wouldn't normally expect to see as far north because it has this very unique climate. You'll get palm trees, you'll get a lot of things that you wouldn't expect to see that do thrive in these conditions.

Katy

Yeah, it's really unusual and it's really very beautiful. I really enjoyed that area so much. But if you can, going on the lake, I personally feel it's a bit of a view when I'm going anywhere, I like to get a big vista, especially when it involves a lake and mountains. So is there any way to go on Lake Maggiore where you can get those wow views?

Jo

Of course, you'll get some amazing views and there are some brilliant walks all around the lake. And we always recommend that wherever you are staying just go to the local tourist office and they'll give you a map of the little paths that you can go on. But if you head up the mountains around the lake and then you can get some fantastic views down looking over the lake. So one of our favorite places is above Stresa, the mountains, the Mottarone - there you can actually get a cable car up to the top of the mountain, but you'll see a view across all seven lakes of the area, which is actually incredible. But wherever you go all around the lake, you'll get similar viewpoints. But just looking at the lake from different angles so you could head up to Locarno at the other end and get a view down from there as Monte Tamaro, which is in the Swiss part of the lake. And you can kind of look over the lakes from there. If you head behind Cannobio, there are some amazing views. There's actually some walking paths of the World War One defense system. But again, as you're walking along there, you can get some incredible views down and actually there's a new zip line. So if you want views at a pace and pull down on the zip wire about 120 kilometers an hour, and if you can bear to open your eyes, you will get a phenomenal view as you're hurtling down it. So, yeah, you're not ever going to be short of viewpoints around the lake

Katy

Oh my goodness. I don't mind a zipline, but I'm a bit scared of heights so I don't know. But I think I'd probably try that because it really is spectacular. We come from a country - it's hard to explain this to people, but we come from a country where we don't have these huge lakes or mountains. Like Australia is a very ancient land and everything's kind of been eroded down.

So when you see these huge mountains and massive lakes, it's just kind of its mind blowing, actually. And it's just I find it so, so beautiful. So when I talk to people that come from like Australia or places in other parts of the world where they don't have these - I always say, go and see the lakes because it is something that you're not going to see very many places. And it just is incredibly beautiful. We did actually do the Mottarone cable car, and I can attest to the fact that that was wonderful. Loved it. And we had a lunch on top. There's a little there's a few restaurants up there actually just overlooking the lake. It's just very nice.

Jo

Did you do the bucket lifts at Laveno when you were there?

Katy

No. That's the hardest. No. I would tell people to do it. But for me, heights, no. And our children - I think they were 3 at the time so I was like 'no!', but they do look good.

Jo

Yeah, not they're good, but they are, for the listener, they are literally a bucket. So some have a roof, but others are literally you are stood in a bucket. And the door can kind of - you just think the door's going to fling open and you go up the side of this mountain - again, it's worth at the view from the top of phenomenal - children tend to love it more than the adults because I think the adults can kind of see the risk factors involved. But, yeah, it's worth doing - the bucket lift at Laveno - it's good fun.

Katy

Alright. I'll put it on the list. I've got a couple of dare-devils in my family so I can go with that.

Jo

Just send them up!

Katy

Now, another thing that I do love about Italy that we don't have here is castles. Now, do they have a castle in? I think they do. There's one that I can think of that overlooks the lake.

Jo

Yeah, the Rocca d'Angera. Yeah. One I've never been to. So I have to say, I've heard great things, but I've never visited myself.

Katy

Oh, I think it's on the other side. OK, we were in Stresa and we could see it poking, poking up over us. But I mean again you've got these views - you've got the lake you've got the mountains and you've got these castles just hanging off the side.

Jo

And you've also got the monastery, the Santa Caterina del Sasso. And that's beautiful. That literally clings to the rocks. Yeah, that's stunning. And well worth the visit. So not quite a castle, but still beautiful, too.

Katy

Yeah, well, we can - we'll take a monastery. So I think the lake activities - is lots of hiking, lots of boat activities and you probably get a bit hungry after a while, I should imagine. What sort of things do they have to eat and drink there? Because each Italy region is very different in terms of its food and drink. So what can we expect in Lake Maggiore?

Jo

So Lake Maggiore, what amazes me is the variety of style of restaurants, actually, because if you go to the top of the lake and actually this is in the Swiss part of the lake, you've got Ascona, which one town has three Michelin starred restaurants. So if you want fine dining around the lake, you can get it very easily. But then you've also got your very traditional restaurants, serving fish from the lake is popular. You'll get a lot of meat dishes, you'll get your wild boar dishes. And I do remember once - it was a scorching hot day in August. And we'd taken our two young children at the time for this walk. And it was beautiful. We came across this tiny little village. I couldn't even tell you the name of it now. Haven't discovered it again. But there was just this one restaurant in the village. We thought great, we'll head there. And our Italian at the time wasn't great, but they had two things to choose from and we chose the wild boar and polenta, which on a cold day in December would have been perfect. So we thought it can't literally be a big wild boar stew - not on an August day. We were absolutely dripping in sweat and this huge wild boar stew came out. Yeah. It did make me chuckle, but all the Italians seemed to be happily tucking into it. But it was a bit much for us in August. But yeah. So you'll get great food. And Luino, you've just got some great pizza restaurants as well, if you just want your traditional pizza and some of the biggest pizzas I've ever seen in Italy and one particular restaurant in Luino. So yeah, you've got a good variety of food to enjoy.

Katy

I mean, it's always great in Italy, just it's kind of crazy - you go and you're thinking, "oh, it's just this little restaurant." And sometimes these little unassuming restaurants are the ones that just - you get the best experience and you're like "Wow! That was a taste explosion in my mouth!".

Jo

Completely and they've often got the TV playing and you just think - "there's no atmosphere in here". But the food is just incredible.

Katy

There's always TV playing and an old guy smoking at the front! And then you go in and you're like, this is incredible. So if there's a guy smoking at the front and the TV's on - definitely go in we say.

Katy

Oh, I love it. So it just is a beautiful place to relax. But what if you wanted to go and head out? You can go up to Switzerland, can't you? But there's another place. Do you know that this is my favorite place? I don't know if you know. It's another lake but it's very, very close to Lake Maggiore.

Jo

Lake Orta?

Katy

Yes. It's my favorite. It's so close, isn't it?

Jo

It is really close. And actually, you know, if you're looking to explore the lakes more generally than actually Lake Maggiore, you can easily get to Lake Orta wherever you are based on Lake Maggiore and you can easily get to Lake Como or you can get to Lake Lugano as well in Switzerland. So actually basing yourself there, you can explore lots of other lakes and Orta San Giulio is probably one of the prettiest towns on any of the lakes. So, yeah, definitely worth a visit.

Katy

It's stunning. And they've got this island in the middle of the lake and you have to get there on this tiny little ferry and you are supposed to be silent when you get there.

Jo

I love the way you say "You're supposed to be silent." Did you not manage it?

Katy

Well, when we were there, the kids were 2 when we were there. It's just so hard to keep a 2-year-old to the best of times. So would you recommend having a car when you're in the area?

Jo

I would. You don't need one. And if you find the right accommodation that you can easily get to a boat, you can certainly explore just using the boat network. And if you're staying for a week, then that would allow you to probably be able to see plenty of things in that time. If you're staying for longer than a week, that there are some places that you couldn't get to easily without a car. So there are two valleys that come down into the lake which I actually love. You've got Val Verzasca and Valle Maggiore and they're absolutely beautiful. So Val

Verzasca actually has the dam that was in one of the James Bond films. It's the one where Pierce Brosnan dives off the dam at the beginning. But you'd have to have a car to go up. But the scenery is stunning. So those kind of places you wouldn't be able to get to without a car and there is some kind of quieter villages on the hillsides, again, you wouldn't really be able to access using public transport. But that's if you've got the time. If you literally have a week, then actually just visiting the lakeside towns and visiting, you know, the places which you can get to would more than fill that time. But yeah, if you want in some of the places off the beaten track, then take a car. But you might find that that car is parked up for three days. So.

Katy

Yeah, I know there's swings and roundabouts there. So are there any - apart from Stresa - are there any others on the train line there?

Jo

Arona - you can get to. And then all along there, actually, you've got on that side you've got Arona, Lesa, Meina, Verbania at the end. And if you're coming from the airport, there's a great bus network as well where it will let you take you direct from the airport to these towns. So very easy to get to the lake using public transport. And if you're coming into Milan Malpensa and want to get to the other side where we were talking about kind of Luino and that kind of side of the lake, then there's a great train network that goes straight from the airport and goes all the way up that side of the lake to Switzerland. So you can certainly get to the lake without having a car. And if you want to get a taxi transfer from the airport, that's easily possible, too. And it's not too expensive. So, yeah, you definitely don't need to hire a car.

Katy

It's really good to know. I get a lot of questions from people wanting to know how they can visit places without the car, because I think, you know, obviously some people get a bit nervous in Italy. But I have to say in that area in northern Italy, the roads are very, very good. And driving is really quite straightforward, especially if you're used to driving on the right-hand side of the road. But even for those of us who don't - that area is actually quite straightforward to driving I think.

Jo

It's going back to what I was saying, the difference between Maggiore and Como. Como, the roads are really narrow around the lake so it can get really chogged and I think just gets a little bit more stressful because it is so tight and narrow. Whereas, Maggiore, the roads tend to be wider. You know, there's two-way traffic all the way round. So the roads will get busy around the straighter area and more around there. But actually elsewhere on the lake, driving is very easy. And the road from the airport to the lake, it's a dual carriageway a lot of the way. But again, very easy. It doesn't get too busy. So I remember once I flew into Bologna and kind of came out the airport there, you know, straight onto the road and the amount of traffic. And it was suddenly so fast and so intense, but you just don't get that for some reason

coming out of Milan, it seems to be slightly different. So I have no idea why, but they seem a little calmer.

Katy

Might be the Swiss influence, I think. I don't know.

Jo

Maybe.

Katy

You definitely noticed a difference when you drive in from Switzerland through to into Italy, it's quite - not just that the coffee gets massively better instantaneously, but the the roads sort of gradually go a bit more Italian as well. Now, we visited the area Lake Maggiore in autumn and it was stunning, actually. So many beautiful colors and just an explosion of reds and oranges and yellows. Do you have a favorite season that you like to visit there?

Jo

I'm not sure. I'm one of these people that whatever time of year I go, that would be my new favorite season. So it is the sort of area you can go all year around. So in the spring, the colors are absolutely beautiful. So we were talking before about the unique climate that it has. Camellias are in full bloom in the spring. Tulips. You have Villa Taranto on the western side of the lake that has a tulip festival. And the colors and the variety of tulips are just incredible. So the springtime I love because of all the color and the flowers and the vibrancy. Summer, I love because of the warmth and the weather. And the one thing I do like about this area is it stays beautifully green so it doesn't go dry and the kind of colors pale, it's still vibrant and green even in the summer months. And that's because it will get its fair share of rain. But typically in the summer, that rain tends to be at night. You'll have beautiful dry day and then you have this dramatic thunderstorm at night, which is great if you've got a view over the lake to watch it and see the lightning come down. So I love the summer and I love being out on the lake and swimming in the lake. So I love the summer for that reason. Autumn, you already mentioned the colors and it's phenomenal. And to me, if you're going on a walking holiday or an active holiday, cycling - spring or autumn of the time to do it, when it's that bit cooler, you're not going to get too hot. It's that bit quieter, but you've got the amazing scenery. But then in winter, when you'd think it would be absolutely dead, you've got skiing and I'm not a big skier, so for me, the little slopes you get around the lake are perfect. We used to go when the kids were little. We'd have a youngster that would literally be sledding down the slopes. And then my son learned ski there because they're very much suited to beginners. There are more serious slopes, but actually, if you're a beginner, a family wanting to be together, it's perfect. But if you're going in the winter, that's the time where I think you need to be more choosy about where you stay because some of the smaller towns will be more closed up because it's not tourist season, so then you'd need to stay in one of the biggest towns around the lake. And that's when I would suggest somewhere like Luino, which isn't a tourist place, but where you'll find your locals.

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Katy

And there's so many different types of accommodation around the lake, too, isn't it? So like in Stresa you'll see some of these like incredibly grand hotels that were obviously built maybe in the 19th century, just like stunning. So you can stay there. But I mean, there's just so many other options, aren't there? Well, I mean, you mentioned that you've got a house there. Lucky you!

Jo

It's a small house!

Katy

I'd take any house right now, on the lakes in Italy, quite frankly. But what other types of accommodation are there up in that area? So you've got great accommodation. So, yeah, in Stresa, that's where you'll find the bigger hotels and where you'll find the very grand hotels, some of which I would argue are a little dated inside, but some have maintained that glamor and a great place to stay. You've then got some little b&b's and more family run kind of b&b accommodation and you'll find that all around the lake. And then in the other towns and villages, you'll get hotels, but they tend to be smaller, more boutique style hotels, often family run. And then, of course, you've got your self-catering options. So you've got everything from a modern lakeside apartment or a lakeside villa where you can literally access the water and you've got the beach on your doorstep, to villas and apartments just on the hillside. And interestingly, the difference between Maggiore and Como again - is Como seems to have seen a lot more building. So on Como, you tend to have a lot more accommodation options because actually they've built loads of apartment blocks on the hillside. Whereas Maggiore, I'm not exactly sure the reason, but they've been much more strict. So you don't tend to get as many accommodation options as on Como or when you do, it tends to be more private. You don't get the huge big apartment complexes that you see on Como as easily.

Katy

Yeah, I think that's a really good point because I did notice it's very obvious actually that Como is a lot busier and a lot more - I was actually surprised that it was that busy, actually, and so when you go to Maggiore and it's a much more peaceful, relaxed kind of atmosphere because there literally aren't so many people there.

Jo

Completely. Maggiore is very popular and I think historically always has been with Dutch and Germans. So the tourists you do tend to find, certainly on the eastern side that we've been talking about, tend to be more Dutch and German tourists. You'll get the Brits kind of more and Stresa. But generally it's just quieter than Como and Garda, certainly.

Katy

Now, some of the things that I love about these areas is their different stories and different festivals, many of them around in the Lake Maggiore area.

Jo

So there are a lot of music festivals around Lake Maggiore, and very different type of music festivals. So Stresa, for example, has got a quite renowned classical music festival that goes on in the summer months. And then on the other end of the lake up in Lugano, they have a festival every summer called Moon and Stars, and that's when you get a lot more kind of pop music and contemporary music. So I think this year, the line up still to be announced, but they're planning to go ahead. I think they've got Lionel Richie and James Blunt planned so far, but they've had some great acts before and it's all outdoors and just a great feel kind of outdoor concert. So, yeah, the music kind of festivals quite prominent and you'll get smaller kind of music events in the other towns and villages around the lake. Normally in the summer months - so July, August tends to be where most of the music events take place. I've already mentioned about a lot of festivals in the spring around kind of flowers. So you'll have tulip festivals, citrus festivals, all those kind of things but they're at different times of the year, but you'll get a lot that revolves around nature as well.

Katy

Oh, it's the perfect setting for a crooner. Just sitting back with a glass of wine listening to a bit of crooning from Lionel Richie.

Jo

That would be good.

Katy

I hope they go ahead - sounds ace. It's very beautiful. Oh, it's such a beautiful area. Honestly, it's a very special part of the world. But now Jo, I know you travel a lot in Italy, so I'm just having one more question for you. Is there another part of Italy that you find very special, too?

Jo

Now, this goes back to a previous answer I gave you where each time I go, it becomes my new favorite place. Every time I go somewhere I'm like "This is just amazing. But I do love a certain town in Umbria called Spello, which I just think is the most magical town. And it has a great feel for it and it's probably partly where I've stayed. So when I visited Spello, I've stayed in the center of the town, which has meant that I can walk to all the restaurants and so on. But it just has a really friendly feel. It's again, it's slightly off the main tourist track. So when people go to Umbria, they tend to go to Assisi and somehow it can get missed off. But Spello is just fantastic. And I remember the first time I went and we stayed in a villa for a week and it had this pool that overlooks the countryside to one side, but literally out the back door you were in Spello and the cobbled streets. And so we didn't go to a single supermarket. We chose to go to the little village store instead and buy our groceries and go to the butcher's and the bakers and buy it all separately. Or we ate out in restaurants and we ate out an awful lot. And by day three, the guy in the little grocery store would give my son and daughter sweets every day for free because we suddenly became regulars. And trying to explain that I needed

dried yeast, not realizing that the Italians very much are into fresh yeast and trying to work out - how do I bake with this?

Jo

And the restaurants are just incredible there. In a very small space, the number of superb restaurants is fantastic. And it's got one of the best kind of little wine shops where you can enjoy plenty of wine. And then the wife of the owner will cook this most delicious pasta with truffles. So, yes, Spello I do love. But I do love - every time I go to Italy, whatever area it is, I will just fall in love with that area again. So Puglia I love because of the food and the beaches are incredible. Tuscany I love because I fall in love with Florence every time I go or Siena. I just think - kind of the hairs on my arms just stand up - I just think it has a feel to these places. Italian lakes, wherever in the lakes I will - it's close to my heart, it's where my family and I bought property. It's where we had so many holidays with our children as they were growing up, where they swam in the lake and we did loads of water sports. So, yeah, everywhere in Italy is wonderful, but I would recommend everyone visits Spello at least once in their lifetime.

Katy

Oh, that's a big coincidence - we actually had a lady on the podcast recently, Michelle Damiani. She's actually living in Spello.

Jo

Oh, I know I'm so jealous of Michelle.

Katy

It's just interesting to hear from a different perspective from someone like, from a different country, literally having a similar experience of the friendliness of the locals and the excellence of the food and wine there. It sounds amazing.

Jo

It's so funny - when we stayed in Spello that first week and the owner of the property gave us a copy of Michelle's book when we left. And then I read it and I can't remember the name of the chap now, but there was this gentleman who she talked about and my father had befriended this same guy during this week that we'd had. So this old chap is one of the friendliest locals there is.

Katy

I love it. I love all these connections. It's so good. And so Jo, as mentioned in the introduction to our listeners, that you have a lovely company that helps people organize their vacations or holidays in Italy and by finding some amazing villas. So do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

Jo

Yeah, so I've got a company called Bookings For You, and we have about 250 villas and apartments all over Italy that we rent out. So I set the business up back in 2010, 2011, actually off the back of buying our own property in Italy and renting that out quite successfully. And I thought, I know what - I'll see if anyone else wants theirs rented. And it started as a hobby and then became a proper business quite quickly. But we've got properties, on Lake Maggiore if people want to visit Lake Maggiore for themselves, but also have villas and apartments in Tuscany, Umbria, the Amalfi Coast, Marche, Puglia, Sicily, so all over. And our ethos is very much to have something for every group. So whether you're a couple or whether you're a large group of 20, we'd have a property suitable. Whether you're into something modern or want something traditional, we'd have something to suit that style. And we also cater for all budgets because for us, it's it's important that whatever your budget is, you've got somewhere really nice to stay. So that's what we're about. We're very much focused on a personal service. So you'll speak to the same person from the time of your first inquiry through to the time of your stay. So you've got that continuity of care. And so that's what we aim to do. We love what we do. It's a great job to have helping people plan their holiday. So even if I'm not able to travel, that means I could just enjoy someone else's travel plans, help them travel.

Katy

And you personally go and check every one, don't you? Or someone from your team?

Jo

Yeah, it's really important, I think, just for us to check the quality of the property, but for us to be able to properly advise guests and whether it's right for them. And it always means we can just try the local restaurant as well and check out some of these things. It's a tough job, but someone's got to do it.

Katy

I know it's really tough. Oh, I just hope you can do it more soon. It's just very frustrating.

Jo

Oh, I hope so.

Katy

Jo, this has been a perfect escape to Northern Italy Lake Maggiore. And I know our listeners are wanting to know more from you. How can they stay in touch with you and the goings on at Bookings for You?

Jo

So we've got a blog that we tend to write articles kind of once or twice a week just sharing our knowledge of Italy. So if you head over to bookingsforyou.com/blog, you'll find lots of content there. Head to our website. And if you've got any specific questions, just want to know a bit more about Italy - just want some advice on where to go or if you've already got a

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trip planned but actually just want some inside information on what to do. Very happy people for people to send us an email as well and we'll just help them out with any advice.

Katy

Fantastic. We'll put all Jo's information and the links, etc. on our show notes page so you can go quickly there and just download and get onto that. Jo's knowledge about Italy is really fantastic. And I've got it for a little while now, and I always love hearing her perspective on things to do. And I need to go get to Puglia because it was on our trip. But I'll definitely be getting in touch with you because I think you need to spend a week at least down there. And I think it's an apartment or a villa down there would be perfect. So Grazie Jo. There's something really special about the Italian lakes, and I can't wait to get back there and explore Lake Maggiore some more. Thank you so much for joining us on the Untold Italy podcast today.

Jo

Thank you for having me.

Katy

So who wants to spend a few days on Lake Maggiore? I have to say, it is a gorgeous part of the world and it's so tempting to be able to go to a place where you can just pop to another country in under an hour. I find that endlessly appealing and doubt it would ever get old even if I lived there. This North-Western pocket of Italy is relatively undiscovered by visitors from outside Europe, which is a little surprising, I guess, considering how close it is to France and Switzerland.

Katy

If you want the details of the places Jo mentioned, then head on over to the show notes at untolditaly.com/72 for episode 72 and you'll find them all there. Plus details of Jo's company Bookings for You and how you can get a special offer from them as a listener of our podcast. We do like to say thank you in any way that we can to our lovely community of listeners. As I mentioned at the start of the show, do reach out or leave a rating or review if you enjoy our show, the best email for us is ciao@untolditaly.com. We love bringing it to you each and every week as we explore all the corners and experiences you can find in Italy. And we can't wait to share next week's episode with you, which is all about pizza. But until then, it's Ciao for now.