

## Untold Italy Episode 79 - Maremma - Exploring Tuscany's undiscovered coast

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 79.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Ciao a tutti! Hello everyone! I hope all of our friends in the northern hemisphere are enjoying their summer and getting ready for their vacations. This year seems so much more hopeful than last year with restrictions easing so no doubt it's going to be lots of fun. In Italy, summer means one thing - the beach! And of course there are miles and miles of coastline to enjoy - 7500 kilometers of coastline in fact - so that's about 4,660 miles I think. And around half of that is beaches, the rest being rocky cliffs. So it's unsurprising that with so much coastline, Italians love visiting the sea during their summer vacation and enjoying some time on the beach.

But what is surprising is that most visitors from outside Europe don't really see much of the coast at all. Most visitors stick to Venice, the Amalfi Coast and Cinque Terre or maybe Sicily, Puglia and Sardinia and if they are clever, Calabria. So if you're a sea lover there is a whole world of opportunity awaiting in Italy.

Which brings me to this week's destination: the Maremma region in Tuscany. Covering almost a quarter of Tuscany, Maremma is a large area in the south west that stretches from just below Elba island to the border with Lazio.

Our guest today is Emiko Davies, an Australian-Japanese food writer, photographer and cookbook author who was last year included in a list of Italy's most powerful 50 women in food. Emiko's second book *Acquacotta*: explores the Maremma coastline and shares recipes and stories from what is called the Silver Coastline. I can't wait to hear her insights into this undiscovered part of Tuscany

**Katy**

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

**Emiko**

Thank you for having me.

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## Katy

Oh, I'm so thrilled to have you join us here on Untold Italy today. I've just loved following your Instagram and making recipes from your cookbooks over the years, and I really feel like I've had a little window into your life. So I'm sure our listeners would love to know your story, too. How did you come to be in Italy cooking up a storm and taking such beautiful photos?

## Emiko

Well, it started as an art student. I came to Florence when I was about to turn 21 and I spent an Autumn here studying etching. And I absolutely fell in love with Florence. After that visit, I went back to university. I was studying in the States and then went home, graduated, went home to Australia. I just couldn't stop thinking about Florence. It just had - I don't know it just sort of planted a seed. But also I felt in those three months I could see that Florence was a place I wasn't done with yet. I needed to go back and I wanted to experience it longer and not just as a visit. I wanted to - I really wanted to live there. And so I basically spent the next couple of years sort of saving up and researching ways to get back to Florence, but stay for a sort of a significant time. And I got kind of lucky because around that time they they started doing a reciprocal working holiday visa for young Australians to go to Italy and spend a year, which was a whole lot better than the normal 90 day tourist visa that you get. So I did that. I applied and I also at the same time got a scholarship to study art restoration at a school in Florence. That was the bit to convince my parents to that it was a good idea to let me go to Florence for a year to study art restoration. And I had a visa that I could work part-time for up to a year. So that was really good. And I arrived in Florence. That was back in 2005. January 2005 I arrived in Florence to spend this year and and I basically never left. So not only was that year not long enough for me, I really wanted to come back again. And so even after that year was up, I came back on the tourist visa, I just thought, I'll just get another three months in. But the week that I arrived back, I met Marco, who is now my husband, and he's the main reason why I ended up prolonging that visa every couple of months and then eventually doing another course. I did a three year restoration course and we got married. So I ended up staying in Florence for love. And also to finish that degree, which I never ended up doing, as a profession for more than a year. Cooking came into it in another way. Cooking has always been my passion and writing about food and talking about food is always something I've loved doing. So that was sort of an accident.

## Katy

Wow. How did you come to fall in love with food?

## Emiko

Oh, I've just always, always loved food. I've been ever since I can remember. I think as a child even I don't think there's any ingredients or any food that I don't like. I can't think of anything at all. And I've been like that my whole life, which is hard for me to understand now because I

have a daughter who is extremely picky and because I was never like that as a child. I just loved all food, loved eating everything, loved traveling and tasting all the different foods that were unfamiliar to me. That's just part of who I am and cooking too. I always loved cooking, so it was just sort of a I think that's the way it came about. It all started coming together was when I started writing a food blog. This was in 2010. I opened my blog at emikodavies.com. That's a place for me to do something creative and write about the life I was learning and living in Florence and write about places we'd been to and sharing a great cheese farm or a great winery or some lovely recipe or some great restaurant we went to. And I was sort of using it like a like a blog, a little bit like a journal, a place to put photographs and yeah, just sort to share my experiences and that little blog which I initially just started for myself to have a creative outlet and something to look forward to doing it just sort of grew and grew. And I started writing for some other publications. And then after a couple of years, I got an email from my publisher to suggest that I write a cookbook. And that was basically - that had sort of been my dream since I was a child. I used to read cookbooks and cooking magazines as a teenager, and writing a cookbook is something that I had always sort of thought, wouldn't that be something? And yeah, it was amazing. That actually is how it turned out.

**Katy**

That's gorgeous and now you've got a few under your belt now. And you just about to finish is your - is it your fourth one you're just about to finish?

**Emiko**

My fifth yes.

**Katy**

Fifth one? Oh my goodness. Oh it's exciting. So, but one of the ones that. I guess is (I think it's you second one is) and it's one that I think it's quite emotional for you is called Acquacotta and it's about the beautiful Maremma region. And I really wanted to ask you on the podcast today to talk about the region, because what we try and do on this podcast is try and uncover some places in Italy that people might not know about, but that are actually very special. And I know that you fell in love with the Maremma yourself, didn't you?

**Emiko**

Yeah. Yeah. The Maremma is our - is sort of our families special place. It's where we have all sort of left our hearts or a piece of our hearts. We moved to Porto Ercole, which is on Monte Argentario in the very southern part of Tuscany, right in the middle of the Maremma. And it was 2015. And we lived there for about seven or eight months with our then two and a half year old. And my husband was the head sommelier at Il Pellicano, which is a really beautiful, really stunning resort in Porto Ercole a very sort of hidden away and just on like a lovely quiet... I have to say, Monte Argentario - just explain it a little bit, because this is basically what started as the idea of this book. Monte means mountain in Italian, and it is literally like

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the tip of a mountain coming out of the sea. So Monte Argentario looks and feels like an island because it's completely round. You can drive around. It feels like you're on an island. Everywhere you go, there's water and it's not though technically an island because it's actually attached to the mainland with a sand bank. So there's like two sand banks that kind of open out like arms that hold on to this tip of this mountain. And in the middle of the arms is a lagoon. And it's like a couple of minutes drive to get from the mainland across the sand bank. One of them has a road and the other one is a national park, so it's just pine trees and deer and beach. And then you've got this lagoon in the middle, which is called the Orbetello. And there's a little town there, too Orbetello. And so in a couple of minutes, you're from the mainland, you pass over the lagoon and you're in Monte Argentario. And there are two towns Porto Ercole and Porto Santa Stefano and this little space, this Monte Argentario is a place where you have a mountain and like quite, quite wild, I would say, like not many homes or anything like that. It's just it's very much covered in woods and there are wild boar everywhere and there's deer and there's lots of foraging going on there for wild mushrooms and things like that. And then you have the sea and Argentario is very close to a lot of the Tuscan islands. So Giglio, Giannutri and Pianosa are all islands that you can reach from that area quite easily. So a lot of people don't know that Tuscany has islands, by the way, there's an archipelago of seven islands and they're stunning and really beautiful. And from Argentario, there's a lot of really wonderful fishing. So the fish available in Argentario from either Porto Ercole or Porto Santa Stefano is quite simply stunning. Quite amazing. So you've got this really interesting spot for - and a very interesting kind of cuisine, because you have food from the mountains, you have food from the sea, you have food from the lagoon. And the lagoon itself has got some really interesting, very ancient traditions. The ancient Romans used to have fish farms in the lagoon, so they would basically build these fish tanks that are in the sea next to their villas. So the Emperor Nero grew up with a holiday home in Argentario. And you can still see the shape of these old fish tanks that was carved out of the stone in the sea. It's quite amazing. And the lagoon is still used for farming fish. This is where you'll get sea bass. A lot of sea bass in Tuscany comes from Orbetello. And they've also got a lot of eels there. It's like a really important place in the reproduction cycle, this lagoon. So there's a tradition of smoked eel in Orbetello. And there's also a tradition of bottarga, which I think the rest of the world knows more famously in Sardinia. But in Tuscany Orbetello is a place that is very well known for its bottarga, which is the key with fish eggs, mullet eggs and the style in Orbetello is a little bit, I would say, softer than the one that you find from Sardinia. But you can chop it and have it as antipasto with like some lemon and olive oil you can grate it finely - you usually have it with pasta, bit of lemon and olive oil. It's all you really need. It's like a flavor bomb - this is basically what living in this place and experiencing these little things in the radius of like just a few minutes drive away was actually, like mind blowing for me, that's sort of what inspired the whole book.

## Katy

I can see exactly why that did inspire you. I find it really amazing that people from Australia or the US, Canada or the UK, they really don't know about this region and wonder why that is, because it just sounds really special and it's a beautiful coastline. I'm really hoping to elevate

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some of these places because I feel like there's a whole world of opportunity out there and just these unique traditions that you can go and find if you just go a little bit further off the beaten path in Italy. Things like festivals and culture. Is there anything special, particularly about that region that you remember and love?

### **Emiko**

Oh, yeah, absolutely. I mean, the thing that I love most about living there was the summer, especially in the summertime. But they do this actually all year round. But they have Sagre, which are - a Sagre is like a food festival. And it's usually done in, you know, it'll be done in the little town. It'll be usually created by volunteers. And often it means that it's like all the sort of the oldies in the town get together and they basically cook for you and they raise money and they'll be like, it's for charity or for something for the town. It's a really nice sort of community event and they'll advertise them on these big posters in town. So when you walking through and you see the word Sagre and it'll have whatever the sagre is, there's always a theme to each sagre. It's not just a random food festival. There's definitely a theme and it's usually something local. So it'll be a sagre for chestnuts, for example, or in the Maremma. One of the ones I really love is that in Capalbio, which is a beautiful town right on the border of Tuscany, and Lazio about half an hour from Argentario, they are famous for this wild boar sagre. So if you go to the wild boar saga, usually every September you'll find a wild boar and all of the dishes. It'll be like grilled steaks. It'll be in a stew, it'll be in pasta. It'll be on crostini like anything you can imagine. They do wild boar, sausages, everything. You can go to this food festival and it's just it's a really great sort of family activity as well, because it's very, very casual. Long tables and people are sort of sitting together. I don't know how that has changed since the pandemic. I think most of the sagre have had to give last year a, you know, a miss. But in general, it's a very informal, very economic sort of meal out and very fun as well. And so, yeah, so each town will have their special sagre in Porto Ercole they have a sagre for a fish that they call Ficamaschia, which is very difficult to find. It's one of the only fish that doesn't get sold at the market. The fishermen usually keep it for themselves and they have them fried so they'll flower them and fry them. And then they have this this sagre, which is done in the - it's actually done in the like on the soccer field of the town. But this is what I mean by it's a very low key, very, very informal plastic chairs and that sort of thing. But it's just it's really fun. It's a great way to learn about the local cuisine. And in fact, when I was researching Acquacotta, I found that it was really difficult to actually taste a lot of these very traditional dishes unless you had a grandmother from the Maremma who was still cooking those for you. But sagre was the next best way to experience them because it was home cooking and it was traditional. And it's often more elderly people that are doing the cooking. And so it's a really great way to experience that side of Italian cuisine.

### **Katy**

It really is. I think it's really hard to find out where they're happening too. I mean, I stumbled upon my first sagre by seeing one of those posters.

## Emiko

Yeah the posters are the best way.

## Katy

Now I'm like, where are they? And I'm looking around because I know just how great they are. But it's interesting because it's really hard to find out the trick of where they are. But I think they mainly in summer and in the autumn or the fall aren't they?

## Emiko

Yeah. Especially because they are sort of seasonal and because the seating is normally, you know, somewhere like a soccer field or it's usually in a big venue where it's best to be sort of eating outdoors. So usually the *sagre* - I mean, in the summertime, if you're in the Maremma, you could literally go weekends by weekends just eating at different *sagres* in every town, you know, every little village. Because that's the other lovely thing about the Maremma, is that each village, even though they might be 15 minutes away from each other, they each have their own sort of specialty. It might be the special thing of that town that the Porcini mushrooms or the chestnuts or whatever else, or it might be a particular dish like *Acquacotta*, which is a vegetable soup. So it might be a *sagre* revolving around a dish or it could be an ingredient or it could be something seasonal. And yeah, you get to know, each of these little towns through their food that way, which is very nice.

## Katy

Maybe we can let everyone know just exactly where it is because I've got the picture in my mind - but how far is it from Florence? How long does it take to get from Florence?

## Emiko

So the Maremma is not an actual official region in that it doesn't have like a clear border. But the interesting thing about the way that the Maremma is defined now, this area, is that what's used is a line from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which I just think is amazing, really, that you're using that to define the Maremma. But he describes this area as starting south of Livorno. There's a town called Cecina, which is where my husband grew up, going on all of his summer holidays. His grandfather had a house there. So basically, Cecina is the first town that is considered the Maremma and it extends all the way down the rest of the Tuscan coast. It also extends inland to a certain extent, travel about an hour inland from the coast. And that is still the Maremma. You want to sort of avoid Monte Amiata the mountain and anything south of that mountain and inland from the coast, that sort of a wide kind of strip going all the way down the coast of Tuscany. And the Maremma actually extends into Lazio as well. So you have *Maremma Toscana* and *Maremma Laziale*. And there's this whole section of the northern part of Lazio, which when you're there, you'll see it even it looks like Tuscany. It is very, very similar to the Maremma, the south part of Maremma in Tuscany, and it goes quite close to Umbria even. So, there's this is you know, it's a very fuzzy line. People who live in

Maremma do pay a tax though. So there is like this Maremma tax line. But it's also a very fuzzy line because it's not strictly in one region. It's not strictly a region. It's like a sub region. But it's not officially a region but you do pay tax if you live in the Maremma. It's also just sort of the Maremma is an area that this will explain also why it's not very well known for many, many, many centuries. It was malaria ridden and there were lots of marshlands in the whole area. In fact, if you go there in the summertime, one of the things that will hit you most is, is it's very humid. It's very, very humid on that part of Tuscany. And because of all the marshlands, there were mosquito problems and there was malaria. And so people didn't visit because - there's actually a song, an old folk song called "Maremma", which describes in the song a loved one going to the Maremma and never coming back because you would go you would catch malaria. And so there was this thing. You didn't want to go to the Maremma because of these problems. And these sort of problems existed right up until about a hundred years ago. So that is why it is literally off the beaten track and it is not on people's radars because it wasn't part of the fabulous grand tour of Italy or these places that people have been traveling to for a long time. It was a place that people avoided. And so in one way that's reflected in how different villages are in the Maremma, even though they're very, very close. So, you know, a 15 minute drive from one village to another that you have, you know, a different way of making *acquacotta* or a different specialty in that town compared to the next one, because even people from those towns didn't really travel. Or I should say this - the towns are all up on the hill because it was so further away from marshes and mosquitoes. And so every time you go up a hill, you find something a little bit different, which is what I find so charming about the Maremma. Now, is this sort of such diversity in an area which is otherwise very similar in terms of the landscape. And today as well, you'll find that if you want to travel around the Maremma, you do need a car. It's hard to get around on public transport unless you're just driving straight down the coast. Then there's a train that goes all the way down to the Etruscan line and you go down down the whole coast of Tuscany. And that's popular for people going to beaches now. But otherwise, yeah, you do need a car to really make the most of the Maremma. And I think that's a good reason why it's still very much undiscovered.

### **Katy**

And do the villages have that typical, you know, if you just go a little bit further north, you've obviously got the typical pastel, brightly colored buildings in Liguria that carry them through into the Maremma or is there a different look of the villages.

### **Emiko**

No, it's very different. So I think what you find in the Maremma is nowadays what you mostly find are these sort of beach towns, beach resort towns that were built up mainly in the 50s and 60s. So they do have that sort of old fashioned vibe to them, not as old as the fishing villages of the Cinque Terre, those those colorful villages, but you'll find like fishing ports. I would say that Argentario sort of has that feel, the little colorful houses, they're mostly like different shades of ochre and yellow. Each sort of part of Italy has their their signature

colors, you know but, yeah, it does have a different feel. It is quite different because I think not until the 50s and 60s did it start becoming a popular place for people to start traveling. To go to the beach in the 1920s was when they started restoring the marshlands and filling them in to get rid of the malaria problem. So most of what you see, the architecture around the coast there is sort of around those dates and the sort of borgo that you can stay in - those farmhouses, is their accommodation or is it still pretty or is it that you have to go find the agriturismo?

### **Emiko**

Yeah, there are lots of Agriturismi in that area because there are lots and lots of working farms even now, like the Maremma has its own type of cowboy. So you've got these Maremma cowboys that are called Butteri. They have been generations of farmers that raise cattle. And then there are lots of cheese farms as well because there are lots of sheep. So they do lots of pecorino and ricotta and that sort of thing in the Maremma. And you can find accommodations and a lot of these Agriturismi, they have accommodation as well. There's also some beautiful little towns like butteri that I mentioned. And there's so many Massa Marittima is another beautiful town. And Campagne e Marittima is beautiful as well. Vetulonia and as a really ancient Etruscan town. So all of these places, the towns themselves, because they're up higher on the hill, they are all like old medieval little Borgi, little stone built towns, which are very charming and very nice to see. And through out you'll find different types of accommodation, all different types. And then for those who want to be like right on the beach, then you've got apartments and these sort of holiday rental places.

### **Katy**

I kind of like that 50s, 60s beach vibe myself. I find it really cool Italian style and it's not to everyone's taste, but I really like it.

### **Emiko**

Yeah, yeah I know, I mean, Italians, when they go to a beach holiday, you know, they like to have the beach resort. So the ??? with the umbrella ???. So this is the beach umbrellas and you go there and you can sunbathe and your kids are playing with the toys and they get to know the other kids around there. It's just a sort of a very - it's a very Italian way of doing summer holiday, which is so different to how we did some holidays growing up in Australia. So it's taken me a few years to get to know and appreciate the Italian way of beach holidaying.

### **Katy**

Took me about half an hour because was like, I can order wine I can have a cappuccino - this is great! My kids are going to be fine. Wohoo - where can I pay? I quite liked it, but you did mention the cheese and so, of course, you are a cook and a the cookbook authors so I would love to know about some of the special dishes of the Maremma.

## Emiko

So I mean, I named the book after one of the main specialties, Acquacotta, and that's one of the dishes that sort of has ... there's sort of no rules in a way, because it is done so differently every town you go to and if you go to the northern part of the Maremma, the southern part, the central part of the coastal part, it's different everywhere you go. But it is sort of essentially - Acquacotta literally means cooked in water, which could technically be any soup, I suppose, but it's usually a vegetable soup and it usually has bread of some form in it. So what that usually means is it's like a slice of Tuscan bread, which is maybe been - it's maybe a day old, it's maybe been grilled, maybe rubbed with a bit of garlic, and it's put in the bottom of the bowl. And then you ladle the soup over the top and the bread sort of soaks up all of the soup and you eat it together. On the coast you can find a version that has seafood in it as well. And in the countryside, you usually find a version of this that has a poached egg in it. So it'll be like whatever vegetables might be in season or around. So in the Lazio part of Maremma - that area is really known for its wild herbs, something that the shepherds used to do which would roam around the countryside with their sheep and collect wild herbs along the way and then cook themselves lunch with the water and the wild herbs and maybe an egg if they were lucky and stale bread. And that would be that was sort of the beginnings of Acquacotta. So you might find wild herbs in there. You might find these days, I think you could safely say the most common Acquacotta is usually like a tomato soup. So it might be like carrots and onion and celery and lots of tomatoes, and then you would crack a couple of eggs into the top of it and eat it with crusty bread. But it changes everywhere. Everywhere you go the Acquacotta. And another dish is a fish soup. So all along the coast, again, that's another one that changes everywhere you go in Argentario, there is a very traditional soup that unfortunately none of the restaurants do anymore. People don't seem to want this. It's called caldaro, but it's stunning and it is amazing. And if you make it at home, it is delicious. It's got a lot of similarities to Livorno's cacciucco. So Livorno is half an hour, let's say, outside of the Maremma and one of the most important ports. And they have this soup that has about 13 different types of seafood in it. It's got tomatoes and it's got red wine and a bit of chili - in Livorno they really like their chili. One of the places, one of the few places in Tuscany that has like a really big tradition of spicy food. And so if you go south to Argentario, you have this caldaro, which is very similar. I have to say it is another seafood soup where you put like all of the seafood in it. And the caldaro is a dialect word for a cauldren or a soup pot, and it used to be cooked right on the fishing boats. So the fishermen would put basically all of the things that they weren't maybe going to sell at the market or maybe like all the little fish that are a little bit too small, they could put into the pot. So it's made with the whole fish. It is really delicious because essentially you've got all of the sort of the gelatin and the flavor from using/cooking whole fish and whole shellfish that go in there. And it's got white wine because that part of Tuscany is better known for its white wine rather than its red wine. And it doesn't have the spices in it. But it is so similar to cacciucco and it's called caldaro. But it's something that you would have to sort of eat at home these days, sadly, the restaurants around there are doing fancier things.

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## Katy

What sort of fancy things do they do that they can't have this delicious soup?

## Emiko

I think that - I know for me that soup is like the fancy thing, but it's, you know, now this sort of area, people are coming for summer holidays. There's a lot of Romans that holiday in this area because it is actually quite close to Rome. So you were asking - sorry, I didn't answer your questions about how far away it is from Florence. We're talking about a two and a half hour drive from Florence, but only an hour and a half from Rome. So it is quite far south and it is an hour and a half is very doable for the Romans to get out of the city and get to a really beautiful, beautiful beach destination. And yeah, I think it's a reflection of that - the restaurants have sort of changed. They're not serving up Acquacotta and these old fashioned soups and things, they're sort of doing the things that people - I have to say that Italians especially love to eat when they're on holiday at the seaside. So they'll have like they're fried - fritto di misto which is like all different fried fish and seafood, or they'll have spaghetti with Vongole and Spaghetti allo Scoglio or risotto of those versions. And now a lot of a lot of people are really enjoying crudo like completely raw seafood and platters of raw fish with oysters and scampi and all different types of prawns and things like that. Those have become really popular.

## Katy

It's interesting, isn't it, how these trends emerge. And I think it's really important that you've been able to document some of these old recipes because it sounds like if they're not documented, they might just literally disappear. So..

## Emiko

Exactly. In fact, when I first moved to Porto Ercole, one of the first things I did was go to the bookshop. There was a local bookshop in town, and I asked for a book of the local cuisine. And this man said, certo, and he pulled down a book and gave it to me. And the title was Cucina Italiana. And I was like, no, you don't understand, I want a book just about Maremma or better would be even more Monte Argentario. There was nothing like that, that existed. And so actually researching the recipes, I couldn't get them strictly from you know, I like to research really, really old cookbooks usually and try a lot of those dishes. When I'm looking at writing recipes about a place. That was harder to do and I couldn't eat at the restaurants to taste or the old fashioned food either because they were doing all the same thing and all things you can find all along the coast of Italy. So it became harder for me - as I said the sagre with really great, the sagre was a great place to get to taste these things. And slowly, slowly, I sort of collected I found some little books here and there, sometimes in a little town. There was someone who had published almost like - they're barely books, they're almost like a pamphlet. A little pamphlet stapled together with a few homely recipes, I managed to find a few little things like that that were little gems that helped research these

recipes. And then there were some really amazing sort of chance encounters that I had by meeting people, talking to people who generously talked me through some recipes that they grew up with. One was my was like my local fishmonger. She was amazing. And being a local, she was able to tell me what sort of preparations they did with the fish that they got. And these are things that you can't taste in Porto Ercole anymore because nobody does them. But very simple sort of fried fish, dipped in beaten egg and then and then fried. So it has sort of - not like the regular fried fish, it's got like an almost like a flaky, crispy sort of covering. And then there was a woman I met at a vegetable stand who was in her eighties and who used to be a cook for 40 years. So she just rattled recipes off at a time like this at me. And I had no - I had just come from the beach so I had nothing on me to to write the recipes down. And she sort of rattled about 10 recipes off and I was trying to retain them in my memory. And as soon as I got somewhere where I could write them down, I scribbled them down. And she was amazing and very, very generous. And those were the sort of things that I came across to research and then be able to put together this book. So that's one of the other reasons why it's very close to my heart, because it was kind of a big adventure trying to collect all of the recipes for the book.

### **Katy**

Aw it does sound like an adventure. Did they have any sweets or desserts in that region? I like to always find out about the sweet treats.

### **Emiko**

Yeah, I know. So I'm a big, sweet tooth myself, and I'm one of those people that always looks at the dessert menu first before deciding what to order. But Tuscany doesn't have a huge repertoire of desserts, I have to say. Like Tuscans are quite, quite savory people. They often finish their meal with just like a biscuit dunked in some dessert wine, and that's dessert. Or they'll finish their meal with a plate of fresh fruit. Like, that's really sort of the main thing. But they do like sweets for breakfast and they will eat cake for breakfast. So cakes that normally would be eaten for breakfast - those for me like the dessert that I put in the dessert part of the cookbook. So I found some lovely recipes by frequenting my local bakery and and pastry shops where things like even a Crostata so like a tart with jam and ricotta or with maybe maybe chocolate chips and ricotta, that's that kind of thing would be eaten as much as breakfast or as a snack, maybe - definitely more than as an after dinner meal. It's still not really eaten as a dessert. So the dessert section of that cookbook is really more, more things that people would eat as a snack. And there are things like Castagnaccio, which is made with chestnut flour. Chestnuts grow all over the Maremma in the woods there. So chestnuts are a thing that you'll find in desserts or just in a sort of a snack. There's actually a stew. This isn't a recipe in there, but there is a stew that is traditional in that area - that to me is like this sort of the symbol of how the mountain and the sea come together in this beautiful landscape. But it is an octopus and chestnut stew cooked in red wine. And when I heard about that, that blew my mind. I didn't include it in the book. I thought people would think, that's really strange and they won't make it. But I do have a recipe in there for calamari and mushrooms,

which is sort of similar, similar thing, you know, the sea and the mountains coming together in one dish. And that is something that you can still taste as an antipasto in at least two places that I've been to in Argentario. But, yeah, the main dessert that I would say is ricotta crostatais - it's a popular one that comes actually from a more of a tradition from Lazio. That's something you'll find in Rome as well. And they do great ricotta, as I mentioned, in the Maremma. And I really love that's very seasonal. It's you only find that like in the wintertime - the chestnut one. And it's just a really great opportunity actually, though, to really eat the fresh fruit when you're in the Maremma in the summertime. There's a lot of beautiful fruit that is grown in that area. And I think that's what you find the Maremma - a lot of it is grown around there. And you can also find lots of random fruit and vegetable stalls on the side of the road. Whenever I see those, I get (my heart goes) and I'm like "stop the car" and we get out and we just like buy all the local peaches and the melons. I've never eaten melons like the ones I've tasted in the Maremma. So, so delicious. And if you're there at this time of the year, you'll find local cherries. Yeah, that fruit is. Amazing. And so if you are in the area driving around, I recommend stopping at every fruit and vegetable vegetable stall you see at the side of the road and tasting the fruit they have on offer - it's a really good.

**Katy**

I'm guessing the cash only are they?

**Emiko**

Ah yes, but there actually there is a good spot that is very close to Monte Argentario. It is probably about a 15 minute drive away. So slightly inland, not too far inland. And it's called La Parrina. They have an agriturismo and they have a like a hotel and a restaurant there. But I go there for their shop - so their little fruit and vegetable store has beautiful fruit that they grow there. But also inside they have all their cheeses. So they've got like all these wonderful, wonderful cheeses. They make their own wine, they make olive oil. And they also sell a few things from other producers in the area, too. And you can just make - it's just like this one stop shop. My favorite kind of shopping where the fruit and vegetable stall is outside and the cheese is inside. They've got beautiful yogurt as well. Yeah, everything is mostly grown right there or if not just nearby. It's absolutely beautiful. And they have farm animals there. So you can send the kids off to go and look at the farm animals, they've got these donkeys, cows and all these different breeds of chickens and things. And yeah, it's a lovely little spot - La Parrina.

**Katy**

Sounds perfect. Now, Emiko, I know you've left your heart in Tuscany or your heart is there and you're right there now, but is there another place in Italy that holds a special place in your heart as well? That's not where you live and where you go on holidays necessarily.

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## **Emiko**

Yeah, yeah. I mean, very, very early on when I first moved to Italy, I would go and visit the Viennale in Venice and do it like a day trip from Florence because I was a poor student back then and couldn't afford to stay in the city. And also because I was a poor student, I never visited any of the restaurants in Venice. But I would just pop into one of the many little wine bars and just get some of the little snacks they have on offer with cicchetti and make a meal out of visiting the wine bars and having cicchetti. And Venice for me was just always a place that I found so inspiring and so beautiful. I mean, it was a beautiful place. It is a beautiful place to photograph, if you like. Contemporary art the Biennale - there is a reason why it's world famous and there's just something about that lagoon. It's just magical.

## **Katy**

It really is. And Venice is the subject of your new book, right? I can't wait to see what you've uncovered there.

## **Emiko**

Well it's about Venice, but it's specifically about the cicchetti, these little little bite to eat. And there's a lot of history in there because I think that that is something that people don't really realize that Venice - is that not only I mean, let's say it's overshadowed by the fact that you're in a lagoon standing on bridges and buildings that are built on stilts in the water, you know? That's kind of the main thing people go to Veniceto see, but once, you know, if you visited a few times, once you start falling in love with the food as well, or this way of life of sort of, you know, the Venetian way of eating cicchetti is just my favorite thing ever. I think that once you've gotten over all of that and marvelled at all of that, when you then discover how historical all the food is, where the food actually came from, where these food cultures came from, it is really amazing to me that part of researching this book, the history part of it was really very exciting for me.

## **Katy**

Oh we'll have to have you back on so you can tell us all about the cicchetti.

## **Emiko**

Oh I would love to.

## **Katy**

Now Emiko, I know from your Instagram, which everyone should follow by the way, if you like food and dreamy photos of Italy which I know they all do. Emiko, I know that you often going back to Venice and you're going around. So people should definitely follow you there. But how can they stay in touch with you on Instagram and on the interwebs, so to speak?

## Emiko

Well, I have my blog, emikodavis.com. I have a newsletter there, too. It's mostly about when I have interesting news to tell you about because otherwise I just tell everybody on Instagram. So if you follow me on Instagram and that's where you get like most of the information and the news that, you know, every day or every week or so otherwise the newsletter, if you really want to make sure you get it in your in your inbox, which you can sign up to on my blog. Yeah. That's where you'll find me.

## Katy

Yeah. I mean, really, everyone get onto the Instagram because it's you know, if you need a little transport to Italy just go to Emiko's Instagram and you'll have that instantly. Emiko thank you so much to opening up our eyes to a beautiful part of Tuscany that well, you know, I'm sure everyone's wanting to explore now. And we've absolutely loved having you on Untold Italy today and wish you very well with your new book.

## Emiko

Thank you so much, Katy. It's been such a pleasure.

So what do you think? Is it time to spread your wings and discover a little more of Italy's coastline? One of castles and sleepy bays, food festivals and farm stays. I hope you enjoyed this little dip into undiscovered Tuscany, its cuisine and culture and are tempted to visit magical Maremma.

Actually it's a pretty nice detour if you're driving from Rome to Florence. You could pick up your car at Rome airport and drive the 2 hours to Porto Ercole, spend a few days by the sea before heading inland to the magnificent Saturnia thermal baths that you may have seen on Instagram and are also in the Maremma. Then onto Montepulciano, Pienza or Montalcino for hilltop towns, wine and countryside before heading to Florence. Not too much driving, lots of beautiful scenery and delicious food. Perfetto!

Of course you can find all of the places, foods and ideas Emiko mentioned during our chat in the episode show notes on our website at [untolditaly.com/79](https://untolditaly.com/79) for episode 79. We've also popped links in there for her cookbooks - Acquacotta - the recipes of the Maremma, Florentine - the true cuisine of Florence, Tortellini after Midnight - heirloom Italian recipes and her latest book all about sweet treats - Torta della Nonna. Do also make sure you check out Emiko's Instagram too for all the Tuscan food, wine and dreamy photos you can handle.

If you enjoyed today's show, it would be wonderful if you could give us a rating or review either on your favorite podcast app or on our Facebook page @untolditalytravel That helps the people of the internet know our podcast is worth listening to and it brings a huge smile to our faces too.

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That's all for this week, stay dreaming of Italy, we'll be back next week with another fun episode of Untold Italy but until then it's "ciao for now"

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