

Untold Italy Episode 82 - Returning to Italy again and again

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 82.

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.

Katy

Buon giorno! Ciao! Hi everyone, Katy here again with another fun episode of Untold Italy that's going to take you around different corners of "the boot" following a family who have taken several trips to Italy.

Before we get started, I just wanted to thank you all for some of the most amazing reviews, emails and messages of support. We absolutely love hearing from you and learning about your travel plans and trips past. Sometimes I get more excited about your trips than my own. I just love sharing this passion with so many people from all around the world.

Here's a 5 star review from JoJo Espresso from the United States on Apple Podcasts that I particularly loved

The Best Virtual Travel!

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"As others have noted, I too have greatly appreciated the opportunity to vicariously travel along with you during the Pandemic — allowing my passion for travel in Italy to stay nurtured and (semi) fulfilled. Not only do I enjoy the diversity in geography and related topics which you and your guests cover, but I've also received so many helpful tips which have assisted me as I planned my fall trip to Puglia, Maremma and the NE region of Italy - to include the Prosecco region thanks to your podcast on that area. Whether it is following your guests on their Instagram accounts, blogs and/or websites, recommendations made by you or your guests on other travel websites, blogs, apps, etc. or your FB Italy Travel Planning Group, the recommendations have been invaluable to me. I always look forward to Thursdays and your newest episode. Cheers!"

jojo_espresso via Apple Podcasts · United States of America · 07/13/21

Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes

Grazie JoJo Espresso (love the name by the way). Sounds like some of our recent episodes were very timely for your trip planning and we hope you like today's episode too.

Now, I might be the voice of the podcast but I also wanted to give a big shout out to our team behind the scenes here. My wonderful assistant Katie and audio genius Mark keep everything ticking along behind the scenes so I can basically have fun chatting to our guests. I really couldn't do it without them and I'm ever so grateful for their support. So grazie mille to you Katie and Mark - I appreciate you!

Now on Today's show where we are chatting with father and daughter duo Bill and Abbey Wrobleski. Their family adventures in Italy started some years ago when Abbey was 8 years old and it became a destination they all wanted to return to again and again. Now all grown up, Abbey has dipped her toes into Italy a few times with and without her parents but their most recent trip was together when they took a last minute trip to Sicily for Christmas. Through their story you'll see how Italy is a place that just gets under your skin and opens up so many opportunities to learn about history, food and culture but it's also a special place to create shared memories with your extended family that you'll treasure forever

Katy

Benvenuti Bill and Abbey. Ciao, and welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Abbey

Hello. Good to be here.

Katy

Great to have you, Abbey and Bill. So good to have you here. So you've had such an amazing time over the years traveling in Italy and really wanted to explore all the experiences you had over the years. But firstly, can you let our listeners know how your adventures in Italy began? Why did you first go there?

Bill

Years ago, my wife had the opportunity to work to go on a European trip, and I went with her and it was it opened up our eyes and we immediately said, we want to go to Italy. That's the next place. And so we planned a trip with our kids. We have two children and my two parents. And that kicked us off. And we've been back and we're scheduling our third trip here for later in the year.

Katy

And what was it about Italy that sort of drew you at first? Why did you feel like you had to go to Italy?

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Bill

Well, I mean, you just hear so much about it, right? It's in the movies. It's in all the media. And the food is notoriously great. Right. So it was just the first place we wanted to go. And I think the experience we had was just phenomenal. Our kids were young. When they first travel they were 8 and 11 I believe and then - and our parents were in their 70s. And so everyone had a wonderful time the first time. And so it was immediately like, we're going to go back there. And now it's become sort of.. Now it'll be a pattern. We were back in 2018 and we go back in 2021. And so yeah I think we'll be going back regularly.

Katy

Oh that sounds like so much fun. So how old were the kids when you first went there.

Bill

So Abbey celebrated her ninth birthday in Sorrento when we were there, which was sort of cool. And my son was a few years older than her, so he was 11 and 12. So it was interesting. When you bring small kids, I know you have children right? I mean, I think you've traveled with some children in the past, correct?

Katy

Yeah. I've got a seven year old twins.

Bill

Oh, wow. We tried to have a lot of green time. Tried to go to parks. We tried not to do too many museums and churches and stuff. We tried to sort of mix it up and that worked out or we sort of had the gelato reward too right? If things went well, let's go get some gelato - a couple times a day, but that has allowed us to do a lot of different things and the kids just thrive there. And that's one of the reasons we kept doing it, was I think they enjoyed it so much the first time we've been able to continue to travel together.

Katy

Yeah, it's an amazing place to travel with kids. And I just think, yeah, you're right, you people kind of assume that Italy's is all history and culture, which is a really important part of the experience. But there's so much else to do to let these green spaces and nature and outdoors. And I think if you're considering going to Italy for the first time, it's really good to know that that's all there at your fingertips as well.

Bill

Right. So I think, like, we were in Rome for the first time, and so in Rome, there's the Borghese Gardens, which is sort of like -for people have been there, like the Central Park of Rome. Right. And it's got a museum, but it's got bikes that you can rent, it's got boats you can

float on. Right. There's fountains you can sort of splash in and the statues all over it. So it's a really entertaining space to visit. And like in the middle of a hot summer day when your kids are tired, giving them a little time to run around in the park, in that setting, just makes the trip a lot easier and smoother. So we sort of learned, yeah, we'll build that in. And it made it a lot easier for the family.

Katy

Now Abbey when you were quite young, so you were 8, just turning 9 when you first went to Italy. Can you remember how you felt and what your first impressions of Italy were?

Abbey

I think I didn't appreciate it as much as I do now as an adult. Definitely. I wasn't mature enough, but I definitely do have like some very fond memories, especially like when he mentioned the bike ride. So in the Borghese Gardens, it was like the four wheel bikes. And so I remember that all of us piled into one and we were bike and all throughout the gardens, like we're trying to go up the hill, Bill ended up having to get out, like push us up. And we ended up going back and doing it again because we enjoyed it so much. We definitely did a lot like things, those activities where it kept us not thinking about, oh, we're here in the middle of August and it's one hundred degrees, but we're having fun and doing things kind of to distract us now. It was awesome. I know when I was there first time at 8 years old, my palette was also not refined and we ended up going around and all I got was like Bolognese ravioli. So we just every restaurant we went through, we just had to make sure they had that on the menu. And so we just- it became like a game that we were like ranking all of the meat raviolis around Rome.

Katy

Yeah, I love it. So the thing is as well, I probably did refine your palate a little bit more because you had such great ravioli that you well now - you're like ruined for ravioli, ever since.

Abbey

Exactly.

Bill

Her palette's quite refined now - we go to the nicest restaurants and she seems to enjoy that a lot.

Katy

All right. So on that trip, you went to Rome and Sorrento and the Amalfi Coast, right? I mean, they're kind of classic destinations and it does give you like that definite wow factor of Italy. So what was the highlight for you of that trip?

Bill

Well, first, I would say, like we didn't know where to go, maybe as I read people on your Facebook pages and stuff, it's like people "well, where are we going to go?" We wanted to go to Venice and Rome and all the big names. And we realized and my parents (we want to be my parents had never been to Europe) and we they're getting older, we want to give them the chance. And my mother had mentioned her friends had been to Amalfi. So we thought that we'll do that. And it's like it's just too much to try to do all of those cities in one trip. So we just decided, let's focus on a couple of places. We went to Rome for about six or seven days and Sorrento and the coast for another four. And it worked out really well. And one of the memories I have is that we were in Rome in August, so it's warm. It was hot and we still had a wonderful time, but then you get down to the coast, it's cool. You're on the ocean. There's swimming pools. It was it was just a nice balance of the big city, hot summer versus this holiday location where you relax and and get away. And so we really enjoyed it. I enjoyed that break quite a bit. Plus just the beautiful scenery when you get down on the coast.

Katy

Oh, it's stunning, isn't it? Now, but maybe you can share with us a little bit about your impressions about Italian beach culture, because it's a little bit different to what we have here in Australia. Definitely. And also in the US.

Bill

Yeah, we didn't spend a lot of time sitting on the beach, but we watched all the people, right? Yeah, it is quite a bit different. I don't know. I thought we actually had an opportunity to live in Hawaii for a few years. We spent a lot of years on the beach. But first of all, one difference is it's not the sandy beach I'm used to, in a lot of the beaches, we go. There's a lot of small, gravelly beaches. But yeah, there's a lot of activity. The hotels are down there with the umbrellas and chairs, and it definitely feels more like a party down there, to me on the beach. And sometimes. That's your impression.

Katy

That's a great way to describe it. I love it because you can get your cappuccino when you wine and your spritz and there might be some lunch and everything's just very organized. It's lovely. I miss it so much. Now, that was your first trip and then so you obviously smitten then you were right going back to Italy. Where did you decide to go for your next trip? I think it was Abbey - you that went on your next trip to Italy, wasn't it?

Abbey

Yes. So I studied abroad in Barcelona, my junior college. So I had one of my good friends from school, was then studying abroad in Rome. So I end up going back to Rome in college. We just went for like a quick weekend. So we kind of just did the highlights all in three days in Rome. So we did a lot of walking. We did the Colosseum again and kind of all the main kind of attractions there. And then it was like my friend's 21st birthday, so we did a little nightlife kind of experience, which was a lot of fun. And then we actually went to the Vatican. And as I was just remembering that we saw the Pope there and he was like up in the little window. And I have no idea what he said because it was all in Italian, but afterward he came down and did his little parade and like the little Pope- mobile, which was really cool to be a part of.

Katy

Yeah, it's beautiful. It's it must have been a Wednesday, I think, because it's the Angelus where he comes out and greets the masses. But that's a very special thing to see. I think so. Well done. Was it an accident that you or did you go there on purpose?

Abbey

It was an accident. We went there to like tour like the Vatican and then he just happened to be there doing stuff. I think it was a holiday. I think that's why there was something special going on that we didn't know. But it was cool. It was a good thing to stumble upon.

Katy

They're the best, I think, you know, you were like, oh, we got to go see the Vatican.. oh we just got to see the Pope as well - fantastic.

Abbey

Yeah.

Katy

So that was your second trip and then did you go in between, from your big trip to Sicily?

Bill

Well, no, what happened is we had we moved to Hawaii for about five years. We were there. We couldn't travel to Europe. We were sort of cut off. And even though we wanted to go - we were 12 time zones away, it's literally on the other side of the world. So we just said, OK, well, we moved back to the US mainland. That was our priority. That was in 2018. We're going to get back to Italy. And so what we did is - I'm a planner! I like the fun of the trip for me is the planning of the trip. And so, so I tried to plan it out but we realized we were go at Christmas time and we thought well the weather at Christmas is a lot less predictable and we didn't want to be spending the 10 days we had in the rain or whatever. So what we did is we

we had we had a couple of weeks, I think we had cheap flights to Barcelona. So we flew and we booked two nights of Barcelona. So we thought we would go in there and then we'll decide based on the weather. The planner - me - I had a few scenarios. I thought we really wanted to go to Matera and Puglia. That was sort of our top priority. We had some places reserved there, but a couple of days ahead, we just said the weather looks really bad there. And so at the last minute we said Sicily is the place then we rented like a VRBO or Airbnb kind of thing in Taormina and then Syracuse. And that we did an Agriturismo in the sort of center part. And it worked out perfectly. The weather was fantastic. And so we sort of learned if you if you can be flexible, trust me, this is against my better instincts - to not have every detail plan, but to be able to sort of adjust. It gave us a much better vacation because we would have gone to Matera, we would have sat in the caves as it rained outside on top of us. So it worked out really well.

Katy

Oh, wow, I'm actually really (you might have guessed) a big plan myself. That's sort of like starting to get a little bit edgy then - thinking, oh, my goodness. But, yeah, good on you. That's amazing. And I think having been in Sicily at Easter time when there's a lot - it's a very deeply religious part of Italy and it was very moving even I'm not particularly religious myself or Catholic, but there was a lot of parades and different foods. Did you get a sense of the Christmas sort of spirit, as it were, in Sicily while you were there?

Bill

Yeah, and Abbey and I were just talking about this earlier. Like, it may not be the deepest religious part of it, but just the lights and the decoration in Rome, in Taormina, in Ortigia and Syracuse . It was just - everywhere looked beautiful. I mean, they really took it seriously to try to lighten up the city, which was really nice. Then they did have some ceremonies we didn't get a chance to go to them. What we found is on like Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, things were pretty much shut down. I think you're right. They took the religious holiday very seriously. So we had to sort of plan meals and such accordingly, right? To know what we were going to do because the holidays were they weren't open. In the United States, you'd find a lot more open activities where we were, there was nothing going on in Sicily.

Abbey

Yeah, there was something we ended up missing out on because we left Termina on Christmas Eve and they had like a tradition - so as we're like walking around the city, we're seeing these giant, like trees, like wood piles just all throughout the city and all the squares. And so we were like, what is this like this like a giant bonfire everywhere. But they weren't lit. They were just like dry logs sitting there. And so we started asking them and it turns out that, like on Christmas Eve, they would like would light them all up throughout the city. Unfortunately we missed it, but it sounded like it was something super incredible that they do like. I think it was like at midnight they just light up these gigantic bonfires throughout the city, which was really cool.

Katy

Well that does sound wonderful. I think, you know, the Italian tourist board, sometimes they are a little bit frustrating to me because sometimes they miss these amazing things, especially Christmas. And I would like to tell all listeners that Christmas is an excellent time to visit Italy because they do go all out with the lights and all that with the decorations. And they have all these unique traditions, like you mentioned, like I remember last year being on Instagram and being a bit sad about everything that was happening in the world. But even then, all the Italian towns, had lit themselves up with these beautiful Christmas lights are so pretty.

Bill

Christmas we spent in Syracuse. So that's an interesting story because there was nothing was open. Some research I did ahead by planning and we found - there's a Grand Hotel Ortigia, I think it's called, and they do a Christmas brunch. So what we did is we booked the Christmas brunch. And that was I think Abbey would say like the highlight of the whole trip.

Katy

All right. Tell me more.

Bill

It was like a six or seven course meal.

Abbey

Oh, yeah. It was incredible. I think it was five or six course meal. And I couldn't even tell you what half the things were, but everything was incredible. And then each kind of course, they brought you they paired with like a wine or a champagne that paired well with it. And there was one particular course that our family still talks about and like, I don't know how they do. It was like a mushroom soup like this, kind of like grayish just thick soup of mushrooms. But on top, it had this like crispy fried, like pig fat, I think it was. And it was the best thing we've ever eaten. We're like licking the bowls, trying to get all the extra crumbs of this like pig lard. Oh my god.

Bill

Yeah. So it was this wonderful experience. We just lucked into that on Christmas. But I think if you people are going to travel on Christmas, I think there are these unique opportunities. Whether the religious ones are like this kind of thing. You just have to do a little bit of legwork to sort of hunt down based on where you are.

Katy

Yeah, for sure. Now, this was called the Grand Hotel Ortigia, was it?

Bill

I think that's what it's called, yeah.

Katy

I don't know if you know these, but Ortigia that's my soul place. That's the one that I've just got a hankering for is Ortigia. I love it so much. And did you stay there for a few days?

Bill

Yeah. One of the other sort of rules we try to follow is sort of three nights everywhere. So you're not always just packing up your car and moving. So I think generally (not always) we were about three nights everywhere. I'd like to even stay longer when we can. But if you do three nights, you have a chance to sort of settle in, get to know the place a little bit. So, yeah, we enjoyed that a lot plus Syracuse has the nice archeological park there, which is sort of a day in itself to just go see all the ruins and those beautiful views out toward the ocean or just walking through those streets. There are all these narrow, little tight streets that make up Ortigia and the big square you open up into. And it was great. We enjoyed that a lot.

Katy

It's a really beautiful special place. It's one of those places where for me, I just gasped. I was like, oh, I need to stay here. Plus I had the best cannoli I'd ever eaten in my life there. That was like a revelation.

Abbey

Yeah we didn't realize that, like pistachios are so big down in Sicily. So like we were eating pistachio always like no other. Everywhere we went, like, oh, we're going to try the pistacchio cannolis.

Bill

Yeah, that seems to be one of the specialties that we didn't recognize. So I think, like when we talk about what was the best meal, other than the one we just talked about there was a pistachio ravioli. Right. Or something like that?

Abbey

Yeah, it was the Sicilian pistachio pesto ravioli that we had. It was like some just like a hole in the wall restaurant, in a dark alley that we were like, oh let's try this. And we went and

this ravioli, me and my sister in law both ordered it and we were like, this is the best thing I have ever eaten. Food is like a big component of our European travels, that's for sure.

Katy

I honestly would have to say that some of the best meals of my life I've had in Sicily, too, and it's just, you know, there's great food all over Italy. But I'll tell you something about Sicilian food, just that there's a little bit of just a little tweaks like the pistachios and maybe a little bit more - maybe North African influences. And it's just, oh. Were there any other must have meals?

Bill

Well, one a little meal we had that you say Ortigia is your happy place mine would be Taormina in Sicily. I could go back there 50 times. For people have been there. It's a small little village that's part perched on the cliffs over the ocean. You can go down to the beach and has a beach, but it's beautiful. It's so nice. That's where we had that that meal. But I think the best day I've ever had - travel - was a day where we first we went to - they have a beautiful theater there. I don't know if you've been to the Greek theater it's in Taormina? It's the most beautiful spot in the world. I mean, I can't imagine a theater more beautiful than that. I think they still do some shows there occasionally. But it's old Greek ruins. And then we went up right above Taormina. There's a little town called Castelmola, I believe. And so it's it's probably a couple hundred meter vertical climb and maybe a kilometer and a half of walking up. So we went up there and just the views were just I don't know, they were just amazing. Just because you're looking down on the city, the ocean or Mount Etna in the distance, which was erupting, by the way, when we were there. But as far as the meal, we got to the top and it was like, well, this is great. Let's just have a glass of wine and there's a little restaurant. There's nothing much there. And we should stop for a glass of wine. But the waiter wanted to give us something. He didn't want us just have wine, so he gave us a charcuterie plate. It was just a charcuterie plate, but it was like we just we sat there. I don't know how long Abbey - it was just a blast.

Abbey

Well, then he was like he was like, oh, we have also the fish pasta is a special today and it's like fresh caught fish. We were like, OK, we'll have on. We he was then like, 'oh, this is also really good. I would recommend this' so he just kept bringing us little samples of things.

Bill

Yeah. And we didn't even plan to eat. And so if I could go back for one day that would be it. So I would recommend to your listeners that Taormina and getting a chance to go up and see the views from Castelmola - that's a wonderful day. You can't beat that as far as a vacation day.

Katy

Yeah, there's something quite spectacular about having a Greek theater as well with Etna smoking in the background. I don't know where else you can have that. Probably no where, actually. It's unique. It's a very special experience. And it's like such a cute little town as well, isn't it? Like just to go wandering and do a bit of shopping. All of the big Sicilian heads - the pots. I'm planning to get some of those next time. That sounds like a very special experience. And after - so you've been to Taormina and then you went to Ortigia and then where did you go after that?

Bill

So Taormina is sort of on the eastern north of Sicily and and of course, Syracuse is in the southern east, so we sort of work a little less than up. So we didn't want to do the whole island again. We didn't want to spend our whole time driving. So we sort of we went through a little town called Noto, you may be familiar with. It's just a small little town, which is beautiful. But we then stayed in Agriturismo, right, by Ragusa, which is maybe an hour from Syracuse, another hour from Caitanya where you can fly into. So it's sort of out in the middle of the island. That was really enjoyable as well.

Katy

Yeah. Let's talk about Agriturismos because I just think are an amazing place to stay. If you really want to get in with Italian life and just relax and soak it all up, it's nothing better than staying in an Agriturismo. And I've mentioned it a few times on the Podcast but I feel like (we were talking about this before), that people don't know that it's really an accommodation option that they have and they really should know about it. What do you love about them?

Bill

Couple of things are nice about it. Maybe I'd be really interested to know how Abbey saw it as well. It's like one - you're with people that are actually running a farm. So you're with the locals, which is really enjoyable. They take pride in what they're serving you because it's the food from their farm. In fact, the place we stayed had vineyards. So although they didn't make the wine, they would give the grapes to someone who'd make wine - so they had their own wine. And so they're serving you all their own wine, their own food. And it was just a great experience.

Abbey

Yeah, it was cool. There were like - it was a smaller one that we stayed in and there's only like a handful of families staying there. But there was this one couple from Switzerland who had been traveling all around Italy and ended up at this Agriturismo as well. And so they that was just like, cool, that kind of because we at dinner you would sit down at, like, family style with all the other guests that were in the Agriturismo. And so they were one couple that were kind of consistently there while we were there. So it just kind of adds to the experience,

makes it feel very homey. Oh, yeah. We did like a cooking lesson. I forget what his name was. But ..

Bill

Stefano.

Abbey

Yes. We did. We made like homemade pasta with him and he just had us doing everything. We were like, are you sure - the food is so good, like we don't want to mess it up.

Bill

We thought we were just it was just you're going to learn to cook. You're cooking the meal for the people that night right? So

Katy

No pressure, no pressure!

Abbey

No but it was super cool. And he made something with some, like fennel in it. And he literally took us out to the driveway and was like, here's the fennel - grab something and we were like, OK, so we're just grabbing like fresh fennel, which was super cool.

Katy

You know, you were talking about one of your favorite meals. I have a fennel and blood orange and caper and onion salad with drizzle olive in Sicily. That was like, wooooooh, it was one of the best meals I've ever eaten. So simple. But the ingredients are so fresh and what's fresher than you could get straight from the farm. Amazing.

Bill

That was even in December when we went. And so I think if you went in the fall or late summer when all those farms are real at their prime, that would be even better.

Katy

Yeah, definitely. And where did you find that Agriturismo Bill? Because they're not easy sometimes to find these these properties. It can take a little searching.

Bill

Yeah, there is a website it might be called Agriturismo.it or something that we found that has a lot. Not all of them are registered there, but a lot of 90 percent. I think it appears that way. So if you go just there's thousands of these farms that have become bed breakfasts, that's essentially what it is. And and so you have to sort of pick where you're going to be. And then what's your price range? What features do you want? Like, we wanted to be able to have a cooking class. Now, to be honest back, this is another one of traveling in the Christmas time. A lot of them are closed in the winter because the farm's not active then. But the one that we went to, they open up knowing that there are travelers for the holidays. So you'll find a bunch of them. They'll be closed and then they'll open up for the holidays. And so, yeah, there's a ton of options. You can go very luxury or you can go really inexpensive, whatever fits your pocketbook. But what you're going to get is an authentic experience for sure, because you're meeting people that are working the farm and also sitting down to eat with you or serve you. It's really yeah. It's a fantastic way to travel.

Katy

It really is. I think it's really important to note as well, because I think some people think it might be like super rustic. But actually, you can really get some very, very luxury, Agriturismo, which I've been lucky to stay at one that had like its own wine cellar, which was a terrible experience. Especially in Sicily, because obviously Sicilian wine is amazing. And also swimming pools, bikes that you just it's not a hiring situation. They just have bikes that you can borrow. And it's a really fantastic way to travel. Now, when you were in that area, that's called the Val di Noto, near Ragusa, which is a beautiful, beautiful city. Did you have any highlights of that? Apart from staying at the Agriturismo?

Bill

We like the Agriturismo. So we stayed there quite a bit. But but we zipped out. There are some famous Roman mosaics that are up north of - I can't remember what they're called now, but any tour book would have the Roman mosaics so we did that for a day trip. Which was actually it was fun just to see, but it was also an adventure just to have to drive through the roads of Sicily - like we used our GPS to do it, but it took us some small streets. My son at the time was about 28 and we let him do all the driving. It's like, OK, you're the driver. And he did really well and and we really we really enjoyed it. But yeah. So that was probably one of our big day trips from there was to go up. We did, we visited Noto the small little town and we visited the mosaics, the Roman - it's like a Roman villa that's been renovated.

Katy

I think it's Piazza Armerina.

Bill

OK yeah maybe that might be right. Yeah.

Katy

And it's interesting that you say about the driving, because I don't know if you've heard my special Sicily driving story, which does involve relying on the GPS and Google Maps when .. it took us down a very, very, very narrow road which we needed to get help to get out of. And we did actually scraped the side of that car. So the moral of the story is you actually - it's worth investing in a map of Sicily.

Bill

It can't hurt. I do want to share once. I probably shouldn't because but like, we did a little speeding to do it. But the last night of the Agriturismo, we had parked up sort of against the building and somebody had pulled in behind us and blocked in our car. And our flight was at 9.am So we were leaving a 6am - we had an hour drive and we had to drop off the rental car and we were blocked in. And so we got delayed. And through the magic of I don't know how we somehow got the car out by squeezing and turning and moving and stuff. But then we were behind it. So we just told my son, you got to go. He's a very good driver. But it was like he did nothing that was super dangerous. But we were - we felt very Italian for about 45 minutes, I'll tell you that. Driving the car. Other than that, I think you hear horror stories about driving in Italy, I, I would be very comfortable driving. I think there are a couple of places where we saw maybe - in the US if the cars would wait, where in Italy, they tended to be more aggressive about going at an intersection. But other than that is I think driving is an easy thing to do in Italy. So not too hard. At least I wouldn't do it in the big cities, but out in the country.

Katy

Yeah, definitely. And I think Sicily was quite straightforward. And you really do need a car in Sicily because the public transport there is really slow. So especially if you've got a limited amount of time, you need a car so you can go and see lots of these places. But if you've got lots of time, enjoy the train is what I'd say. OK. Well, I mean, that just sounds like an amazing trip. It sounds like you've got so many fun memories from the air that you've also decided to go back. Was supposed to be last year, wasn't it?

Bill

Yeah, we were going to go back last year. And so I should mention, we brought my son's wife. It was the first time she ever been to Europe and she is of Italian descent that she had a great time. It's really fun watching these experiences through other people's eyes. And and so that made the trip even better, I think, because she enjoyed it so much. But yeah. So we wanted to get back. And I've always wanted to go to Cinque Terre. Now, frankly, I was always a bit a little scared about it just because you hear all these horror stories about tourism. But it's like I just want to see it. We're going to go. And and so we've decided we're going to try to go at the end of this year now. Presuming - knock on wood - that covid/everything works out for

us. It seems like it's trending in the right way. So we're booked to stay in the Cinque Terre for four days. And then sort hike Abbey's a big hiker and I am a big hiker. We're going to really see that area and we're excited about that. And then we're going to go from there and go to an Agriturismo in Tuscany and spend four days. You've got me hooked on the Chianti region, because I think you've done a couple of podcasts around Chianti. So so we're going down there and then we'll do day trips to Florence and Siena that. So that's sort of our next big plan. That's with Abbey and her friend. So the four of us who traveled together and my wife and I before that are going to go down and do we're going to try to make that trip we missed last time. And I mentioned we wanted to go to Matera and Puglia. So we're going to go we've rented we're going to do a week, three days and Matera, three days Puglia. And then we'll meet Abbey and her friend up in the Cinque Terre for the rest of the vacation. So we're going to hit both the southern part and the north western part. It'll be a little bit of travel, but it seems like it'll be worth it.

Katy

Oh, it does sound good. Are you going to drive between the two places?

Bill

No, we're going to fly. We're going to drive, we're renting a car, obviously, like, I think down south, they don't have as much train infrastructure, but so up and Cinque Terre, we're not driving at all then when we get to Tuscany we will and then we were down south we will as well. It just seems more practical.

Katy

It definitely is. So you can fly from Bari you probably going from Bari to Pisa I would say, or maybe Florence. I don't know.

Bill

We're actually go to Genoa. I don't know much on Genoa. I hear it's sort of a harbor town. But we'll we'll see it - see what it's like.

Katy

It is a very interesting town and there's some beautiful - like that whole coastline is actually stunning. Everyone sort of gravitates towards that Cinque Terre. But like, actually there's so many villages and towns along that coastline that are just absolutely stunning, even just outside of Genoa. And the food there is absolutely to die for, and it's very different and so you're going to have a really different experience to the one you had in Sicily because they have a lot of legumes and pulse's and ancient grains and the pesto, which is delicious. Just - it's going to be an amazing trip for you. Plus then you've got in Puglia you've got a whole other

explosion of flavors down there. What an exciting trip. And Abbey, what are you looking forward to the most from that trip?

Abbey

I'm really looking forward to Tuscany. I just love the vineyards and kind of like just kind of stereotypically in my head, I picture like the rolling hills with all of the vineyards on top. And I just really like kind of the countryside like that. So I'm really looking forward to that. And then I have a friend who went to Cinque Terre a few years ago, and she just she did a lot of the hiking and just had gorgeous photos of just being right along the coastline. So I've always wanted to go to that region as well.

Katy

Beautiful - now what I love about your trips is you've managed to pull all your different friends and family into these shared experiences. And for me and I hope for all our listeners - there's no greater gift than travel and these shared experiences and I'd pour all my money into that if I could, because I really feel like that's the sort of the essence and the joy of life. Do you have some other strong memories of your travels in Italy that you'd like to share?

Bill

I can share some advice on that, though, because having done it, you know, we've had we traveled a lot of different people. I've traveled with my sister and my brother in law, the kids, friends and stuff. What you want to do is just don't over plan everybody. Everyone likes different things. And so you don't always have to be together. Right. So in Tuscany, Abbey and her friend want to drive a Vespa, so we're just OK, one day they're going to hop on a Vespa, they're going to leave us. They're going to go do whatever they do on their Vespa. Don't feel like you have to plan and control everyone's every minute because everyone wants different things out of their vacation. I think we've been really good about just letting everybody be themselves. We like to be together. But there's no question we love meals and sipping wine together and seeing sights. But we've got to build some flexibility so that people don't feel trapped in that, that they can sort of be themselves and tailor it a little bit. Like when we traveled with my parents it was like - well we like to walk, but my parents are in their 70s. They can't walk from the Colosseum to St. Peter's. So you just have to tailor it and say, well, when we're traveling with them we're going to take cabs. And so I would just say it's so much more fun to travel with people, enjoy - see the sights through their eyes. I love it. But you do have to sort of adjust and tweak the way you travel. You can't have it just your way. You've got to think about what everybody sort of needs and try to be flexible.

Katy

It's such a good point. Well, what we found when we were traveling with my parents and our twins, who were then 4. That 4 year olds and 70 year olds have very similar needs in terms of naps.

Bill

And Italians do that, too. They take a break during the day. But we did naps. And so, Abbey, you remember, you climbed to the top of St. Peter's with Grandma, right. And she she really loved that. It seemed like that wherever we went, there were stairs. I remember the last night of the trip, I took her to a restaurant and she was like, I go to the bathroom and the bathroom was upstairs. And she to this day, she says, well, Bill, picked that restaurant just to make me go up those stairs. It was a great experience because it is hard. You know, when you're in 70s or 80s, you know, you can't do the same thing. So we we tried to tailor it for her but even so, she was a trooper.

Katy

But I love that you can still find those experiences. And she still has fond memories, even though, you know, like there's a little bit of mobility issues, et cetera. You know, you can make it work for you. And it's just the magic of Italy, really, because you have so many different types of experiences. We started off talking about like our little kids, you know, you like how you can tailor things for them. And then you obviously have grown from loving ravioli, meat ravioli into, as you say, a much more refined palate of mushroom soup and pork lard. I feel like for me anyway, like I have grown and my appreciation of Italy has just grown more and more and more as I've got older and had more trips. And it's an absolute joy to travel there. And once you've done this trip, do you have any plans for other trips?

Bill

One of my rules my wife and I have that was I'm only allowed to just plan one trip at a time. Because I'm like you Katy, I like to plan. So I'd say, OK, I may have planned more in my head, but I'm only tell you about one at a time. We're going to try to enjoy this one. But what I really like is that a lot of different regions . Abbey's now going to have a chance, even at age 26, to spend time in about 7 or 8 of the different regions of Italy. And I'd love to just keep getting to all of them and experience the different because it's much I don't know what it's like in Australia, in the United States all the states can be very different and that's the way it is in Italy. And so it's fun to sort of explore those differences.

Katy

Yeah, I think it's amazing how you can just go from one town to the next and even have like a different cheese or a different wine or a different way of making and they're so proud of that. And it goes back centuries and it's something very special and it's part of the reason why I love Italy. This has been such a fun chat, thank you to you both, and I know our listeners would love to connect with you. How can they do that if you want to share that?

Bill

Well, I'm on Twitter. You can always connect with Bill Wrobleski W.R.O.B.L.E.S.K.I.

Katy

We will definitely check you out there Bill. So thank you Abbey, thank you Bill. I've absolutely loved hearing about your families adventures in Italy over almost two decades now. So here's hoping you can get on that plane and enjoy your time exploring some more this year. Thank you so much for joining us on Untold Italy today.

Abbey

Thanks for having us.

Bill

Thank you.

Katy

Grazie Thank you to Abbey and Bill for sharing their travels in Italy. I really loved how Abbeys's palate has changed and evolved since her first trip to Italy. And how each trip has opened a few new doors of discovery for the whole family.

One The Wrobleskis did (great planning Bill) and it is some thing we can all take away and action I think, is that they made some great accommodation choices on their travels.

I believe getting your lodging is one of the most important decisions of your trip planning.

If you can fit it into your itinerary, do try to stay in an agriturismo or farm stay, a masseria which is a country estate or borgo - a medieval town that's built around a castle. Not only do you stay in beautiful countryside and surroundings but you'll most likely taste the freshest local dishes and meet some interesting people.

If you'd like more information and details of Bill and Abbey's trips you can find them in the show notes at untolditaly.com/82

We've got some great listener trip stories coming up on Untold Italy but as always, we're always keen to hear from you, especially if you've taken a special or unique trip or even planned a special event there, maybe a wedding? Or even a proposal? that you'd be happy to share with our audience. You don't need any special media training, we literally just have a chat on line and then our wonderful audio team works some magic to create the episode. Reach out to us at ciao@untolditaly.com if you'd like to be a guest on the show. We can't wait to hear from you.

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That's all for this week, next week we're going to an island I haven't shared with you yet but it has the enviable reputation of being home to some of the best beaches in Italy.

Just perfect for the northern hemisphere summer don't you think! But until then it's "ciao for now"