

Untold Italy Episode 83 - Sardinia: Sun, Sand and Sea

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 83.

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

Ciao a tutti! Hello everyone! It's summer time for many of you so I thought we'd take a trip to Italy's best loved island for pristine beaches - some say they are the best in the world!. We are of course talking about Italy's second largest island, beautiful Sardinia or Sardegna as it's called in Italian.

Not as well known outside Europe as her southern sister Sicily, Sardinia is however a very popular resort island beloved by Europeans. But it's not just home to stunning beaches. Sardinia is an island rich in history, culture, tradition and natural beauty just waiting to be explored.

Our guest today is travel blogger Claudia Tavani who grew up in Sardinia and returned to live there after traveling the world.

Claudia is the author of travel site Strictly Sardinia which has lots of useful information about things to do and places to stay when you visit the island.

We're going to find out lots about all of those things during our chat today including some of her favorite secret spots. So without any further ado I'll welcome her onto the show.

Katy

Benvenuta Claudia, welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Claudia

Hi, thank you for having me. Nice to be here.

Katy

Oh, I'm so excited that you've joined us on Untold Italy today. I've actually never been to Sardinia myself. But as I mentioned to you before, it's on the list. I just really can't wait to

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hear all about your home, Claudia. And I think our listeners would probably like to know a little bit more about you first.

Claudia

I was born and raised here. I'm actually half Sardinian because my dad is from another part of Italy. He's from a city near Rome. But, you know, when you live in Sardinia for such a long time, even my dad will tell you that he is from Sardinia - without the accent, because we have a very peculiar accent compared to the rest of Italy, but Sardinia grows you. It's a very unique place. It's the kind of place that is Italy, but not quite so. You know? People from the rest of Italy, when they come here, they say they cannot quite put their finger on why it's so different. And when I go to Italy myself, I'm like, something is different from home. It's just a very unique place with a very unique culture.

Katy

And you're a travel writer and blogger, just like I have been. And am - still now and I know you've got a website about Sardinia, but you also brought about in general and you've traveled the world. But what makes Sardinia special? Why do you stay there? And why do you want to stay and enjoy that part of the world?

Claudia

You know, I lived overseas for 10 years. I split my time between the UK and the US and spent some time in Switzerland as well. Home is home. No matter where that is. And, you know, I think Sardinians in general, not just me, we're very attached to our land. We're very proud people. We can see the shortcomings of our region. We can see the many issues. But we're the only ones allowed to actually criticize and we won't take criticism from other people, actually, we do it but not to that extent. Sardinia is simply beautiful. It has anything you could possibly want from a place to live and to travel. Beautiful cities. I live in the main city of Sardinia, the capital Cagliari, and we have lots of archeology. We have beautiful nature in terms of mountains and wildlife. We have some unique species here and we have the most beautiful beaches in the world. And I'm not trying to brag. They seriously are. Take my word for it. I've been to the Maldives, I've been to the Caribbean, you know - I've been to Mexico. I've been to many places. And yes, you can see the beaches are beautiful but they're not quite like Sardinia - sorry, when people tell me that beaches in Sardinia look like the Caribbean. I'm like, first of all, maybe some Caribbean beaches look like Sardinia. And secondly, if you actually have been to Sardinia, you will know that the beaches in Sardinia are better. Our sea is much more transparent because we don't have the strong currents that the Caribbean has. So, you know, maybe they can aspire to be like us. Maybe.

Katy

Oh you're setting a very high bar there.

Claudia

So, you know, I'm bragging, actually.

Katy

Oh, really? Obviously, Sardinia is very, very famous for its beaches. But what are some things that people might not know that they should know about?

Claudia

One thing I insist on is that Sardinia is a gorgeous place to visit any time of year. Even in the winter time. There are plenty of things to do. It's a great hiking destination. So if you are into nature, you will find lots of lots of good hiking trails. Some of them are mountain hikes, some of them are forest hikes, and my favorite are the coastal hikes. So you're kind of like walking and puffing and then at the same time, you have incredible sea views, which are just amazing. We have lots of events that maybe other travelers that prefer going to Italy don't know about. Carnivale is huge here. We have some very interesting carnival traditions and festivals that are just fun to experience - the food, obviously, and the wine. We have really great wine. Archeology, as I said before, we have Sardinia has stratified history. We first of all, have some sites which are called Nuraghe, which are only found in Sardinia. So this is the only place in the world where you can see them. There's nothing quite like it. They are stone structures. There are still ongoing research that is meant to establish what they were used for. Some research says they were used for defensive purposes that were military structures. But you can see entire villages. So you know that if you visit them, a Nuraghe there is going to be a main castle and then there's going to be walls and there's going to be what were kind of like assembly rooms, temples, houses and stuff. And then you can also find Punic and Roman sites in Sardinia, which is quite unique, obviously, because we were conquered by Rome. So, you know, this is just some of it.

Katy

Yeah. And of course, so maybe we should just back up a bit because most people know Italy's islands. They will definitely know Sicily, but they may not know that Sardinia is an island. So let's just really give it a bit of geography where exactly Sardinia is. And make sure that people understand exactly where it is.

Claudia

If you grab a map of Italy and actually the Mediterranean basin at the very heart of the Mediterranean, the big island is Sardinia. It's the second biggest island in the Mediterranean after Sicily. So you cannot miss it. It's huge. The reason why many people don't know where Sardinia is is that we haven't done a very good job of promoting it overseas. There's more people in Sicily than there is in Sardinia that pretty much for the same surface, they are around six million and there is only one point five of us. So obviously there's less people talking about it which makes a difference.

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Katy

And did many people emigrate from Sardinia or because I think that's what happened with Sicily, a lot of people immigrated to the United States or Australia.

Claudia

They have there a lot of people from Sardinia living in other parts of Italy, some in the U.K., Australia. I have some friends that have relatives in Canada or or say the US, there's a very large community of Sardinians living in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Katy

Hmmm.

Claudia

Yeah. We are scattered around the world. Obviously there's less of us around the world because there's less of us here to begin with.

Katy

And I think it's so well known for the beaches and having lived in Europe myself, I know that people would definitely head to Sardinia for the beaches. But like you said it sounds like there's so many other really interesting, different and unique things to do in Sardinia. So where would you even start, like, if you were going to go and spend, say, a week or two weeks in Sardinia, how would you sort of suggest people approach that?

Claudia

If you have one or two weeks? I suggest a road trip.

Katy

Ah.

Claudia

No matter the season, a road trip is the best way to appreciate the landscape and everything that the island has to offer. We have three airports, so you can start in any of the three cities. I recommend starting from Cagliari my hometown, because it's the biggest one, it's the one that has the largest tourist offer in terms of restaurants, hotels and places that are nearby that you can see, and then from Cagliari, you can start exploring and work your way up north and drive to the other places.

Claudia

But the road trip is probably the best way to appreciate the island. One day you visit an archeological site. Another day you visit, you visit a city, then you go for a hike, and then you go to a beach and then you go visit a winery. There's - you can mix and match lots of things to do, whereas if you're not for a road trip coming in the summer and just stay at the beach.

Katy

Which are some of the best beaches that people really enjoy there. It's obviously very subjective, but you don't have to give away all your secrets.

Claudia

There are so many, so many. Like I cannot even start naming them all. But I'll give you one that it's not the best beach in Sardinia in terms of natural beauty, because we have more beautiful beaches. But if you just decide to come here for just, say, three or four days during the summer, months from May till the very end of October, because we have a long summer, even Cagliari has a few gorgeous beaches. The main one is Poetto. It's called Poetto. And, you know, we locals love it, although we don't think it's so beautiful. But, you know, it's a very, very long sandy beach with lots of small restaurants. There is a nature reserve at the back with pink flamingos. There is a mountain at one of its ends that you can actually hike for views. And it's a very easy hike. There is a biking and running lane. You can go for a walk. It's super kid friendly. So if you just have one day for a beach when you're in Cagliari, that's the one you should probably hit because it's so easy to reach. If you don't want to have a car, you just get on the bus from the center of town and it's ten minutes.

Katy

Is it a lido or is it a free beach? Can you just put up a towel?

Claudia

All beaches in Sardinia are free to access. Poetto is - I maybe mistaken, but I think it's 12 kilometers long (I need to research) so 12 kilometers is I think roughly 8 miles. So you will find lots of stretches that are completely free to access. But if you want to have a super comfortable day, you can just rent a stop at one of the Lido and rent an umbrella and sun beds and then you have everything you need for the day. But all beaches in Sardinia are free to access.

Katy

Excellent. And from there. I can picture it now, I really just love a lido because we don't have them here in Australia at I do talk about this a lot, but people want to go and experience some Italian beach culture that they need to go and do that, because it's really/ it's very...

Claudia

Italian.

Katy

It's very Italian and it's very civilized. I have to say, because you could just get your cappuccino, or your glass of wine and just relax and just just enjoy everything. And you don't have to worry about finding a bathroom or, you know, getting changed under a towel.

Claudia

Yeah, that and placing the umbrella. And then if it's windy, the umbrella is going to fly away and then looking for shade and then keeping distances. Yeah. A lido is a good experience. I agree.

Katy

And probably we should mention is the beaches in Sardinia are mainly sand beaches, aren't they? In contrast to the rest of Italy when you don't actually find so many sand beaches?

Claudia

We have everything. We have sandy beaches. That's the majority. And there's different kinds of sand. Some is very powdery and it looks like talcum powder. It's so white and fine. I'm kind of like attaches to your skin and we take a few days to get rid of it. Other beaches are more like not so fine sand, but they're golden or we even have pink beaches. And then we have pebbly beaches. We have some beaches where the sand looks more like grains of rice. We have, as I said, pebbly beaches, we have rocky beaches. We have everything. The one thing I want to stress is that you cannot take sand from Sardinian beaches. In fact, you should not take cent from any place in the world. Sardinians sand is highly protected. Every summer the news will pop up on regional channels. Even sometimes they even make it into international like BBC or CNN that people stole sand from Sardinian beaches and they've got 6000 Euro of a fine. It's protect. It's protected, it's precious and I keep wondering, why do people steal sand from a beach? What do you do with it when you go home?

Katy

And then it gets stuck to everything, as you just said? Yeah, I think it's very important to reiterate that actually. Sometimes I think people don't know, especially if you come from a country where it's abundant, but even so, you don't touch it, just leave it as it was when you found it. So other people can appreciate it. I want to see the pink sand beach. Where do we find that one? Sounds gorgeous.

Claudia

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The most famous one is in the island of Budelli, which is up north in the Maddalena Archipelago. It's a super, highly protected beach. And Maddalena Archipelago is a national park. So you can only see it from afar. If you go from if you go on about there's one that I go to all the time, basically every summer. I'm going there in a couple of weeks, actually. It's Punta Molenti. The only thing is that when you go in the summer months, you don't really realize it's pink because there's a lot of people. I've been there in, I think it was April. I think I went for Easter with my sister. We went to take pictures. And when I looked at the pictures, I could see because I took some pictures from a rock formation and I could see the view. And then I realized it's actually pink, like completely pink. It's beautiful. It's absolutely beautiful.

Katy

Oh, how stunning. I'd love to see that. Wow. And so you talked about your hometown, Cagliari, and tell us a bit about that. Like, what's the history and what can we expect if we go?

Claudia

It's a mid size - well, I'd like to say midsize maybe to someone, it's a small size city. The city itself, it's about we have about one hundred and seventy thousand people. But with the metropolitan area, so know with the metropolitan area and surrounding cities and towns, it comes up to about three hundred and fifty thousand. So it's not that small. It's a very old city. The Phoenicians lived here. And in fact, there is an archeological site right in the center of town that is a Punic - the Acropolis. And then the Romans arrived. And we have Roman archeological sites, Roman villas, a Roman amphitheater also in the center of the city. You're walking around town and you're like, oh, here's a Roman amphitheater. You walk around town and here is a villa, a Roman villa. And then the city is on the hill. So we have several hills much like Rome and in fact, also much like Jerusalem. In fact, writer DH Lawrence said that Cagliari reminded him of Jerusalem a lot. And we have lots of parks in the city. The city is obviously, as I said, it's on the hills, but overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. So we have the best of everything. We have lots of narrow alleys with colorful buildings, lots of excellent restaurants and bars. And what I love about Cagliari is that it's still very much a local place. So, you know, you do come across tourists because it's becoming a more popular destination. But we live here. We own the place. We still live in the city center. We still hang out in the city center. It's not a tourist town yet. And I hope it doesn't ever become overwhelmingly touristy. So, you know, the atmosphere is very pleasant and the weather is nice. You know, we have a lovely summer with lots of nice breeze. And then during the winter, it's never too cold. As I said before, we have a few gorgeous urban beaches and then we have a nature reserve right within the city where we can go birdwatching. We have - come to think of it, you know, another city that will remind me, that Cagliari reminds me of is Cape Town. It's the same environment where you get lots of history within the city, but also within the city. You have wildlife, you have hikes, you have views, and it's just fabulous and it's small and it's easy to manage.

Katy

Yeah. And you can walk around easily and yeah.

Claudia

Absolutely. Absolutely. And it's also compared to many other places in Italy, it's also quite budget friendly, you know.

Katy

OK, why is that? Because the accommodation is probably cheaper or..?

Claudia

That and restaurants as well. I mean, don't expect budget as in Thailand budget, but compared to many other places in Italy, it is more budget friendly also compared to other places in Sardinia - it's more budget friendly. That's because we live here. Locals, locals own it. And that means that either you make prices budget friendly or we cannot afford it.

Katy

That's true. Now tell me a bit about the restaurants there, because I do like to wine and dine, that's my thing. I really like to spend time doing that.

Claudia

Where do I start? So we have lots of excellent seafood places. You can eat anything that goes from the traditional trattoria food, which is basically what you would eat at home, what your mama would cook, you know, where you have a lot of seafood pasta, you have lots of grilled fish, fried calamari, two more fancy ones where you go and have salmon or tuna tartare or fish ceviche. And with anything that is locally sourced, obviously I love a good pizza. And we have one of the best pizzeria in Italy is actually here in Cagliari. They make this excellent, fabulous pizza. Their dough is actually sour dough and it's so moist, and crispy and they use only local ingredients to whatever you see on your pizza was locally sourced. I go there all the time, like whenever someone is visiting from anywhere else in Italy I'm like "taking you to Frumento pizza". Frumento is the best. Last week I dined at this place called La Paillote. It's located in this teeny tiny kind of cove overlooking the sea. And the views are amazing. You go there around sunset and you have you know, you're sitting there with a glass of prosecco or a delicious cocktail, and the views are incredible. And then the food was amazing. So, so good. And the atmosphere, I mean, it's expensive. It's not cheap. But..

Katy

Yeah, sometimes you have to pay for those experiences that you remember forever. Oh, goodness. And what are some of the real local dishes of Sardinia that you have to absolutely try when you're there.

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Claudia

So, it really depends on your tastes. Traditional, super traditional Sardinian food is a lot of pork, which - people are shocked because it's an island and yeah have lots of lots of fish. We eat lots of fish. But because of the traditional occupation, the traditional environment, a lot of food here in Sardinia is pork or lamb. So we have lots of pork and lamb dishes. One of the traditional pasta we have is called Malloreddus. Italians call them gnocchetti sardi because they like they look like small gnocchi, but they're not made with potatoes and they're served with a very thick, rich sauce, with meat, with Sardinian kind of sausage and tomatoes. It's kind of like the pasta you would have in the winter time on a Sunday. Every every good mama makes it at home. One of my favorite is called Culurgionis. Again it's a pasta and it looks like - the idea is that of a ravioli - kind of filled pasta. It's the kind of - it originates from a specific region of Ogliastra. But even there every single village has its own recipe, every single family has its own recipe. My favorite is the one from Seui village and they are made with a specific kind of cheese. So they're stuffed with cheese and potatoes and mint and a little bit of garlic. If you go like if you talk to my friend from Atzara he would tell you like oh mint in Culurgionis? No no no no it doesn't go. It's not the only real Culurgionis as are those from my, my mom's village. And I'm like - it's kind of like every single family, every single village will have their own way of making them. And this is very much Italian I think. We each have our own food and we each say ours is the real one, you know.

Katy

Yeah. I've been in the middle of a few olive oil wars lately. We've got the best.

Claudia

I can tell you. The best olive oil in Italy is from Sardinia - like one hundred percent.

Katy

I'm sure. But I mean, you know, one thing I found out from doing this podcast and it never really occurred to me, I don't know why, but these are many different varieties of olive oil trees. So, you know, the different terrain takes on different tastes and different harvesting styles. It all is very different. So I think it's fascinating.

Claudia

I know people here in Sardinia that actually buy olive oil at the supermarket, I mean, they sell it, but most of us actually have a specific olive - like a place like a mill where they go buy their olive oil. My parents, in fact, buy olives from my aunt. She has olive groves and then they take it to the place where it can be processed. It's an ordeal.

Katy

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But it tastes good, though. It's worth it.

Claudia

Oh, my God. It's amazing. It's delicious. It's delicious.

Katy

Is that something you can go and see. Just go and see how the olive oil is pressed. Is that something you can do?

Claudia

I've never done it myself. I don't think that there is a tourist... maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I've seen it and maybe I've seen tours sold to do it. I've never done it myself, but it definitely can be arranged.

Katy

So I think those type of things are really interesting to people because unfortunately, you know, mostly in our culture that's what we do, is we go to the supermarket and we don't really know where our foods come from. So it's an amazing, amazing thing to go and see exactly how things are taken from the plant to the plate.

Claudia

Yeah, I mean, much like the rest of Italy, we have a strong food culture, which is not just what we eat, it's also how we prepare it, who we share with, where we shop it. It's everything, everything.

Katy

And now there's some really great local markets where you live too?

Claudia

There are many. My favorite one is Sanbenedetto, which is in the center of town, and it's one of the largest fish markets in, I think, either in Italy or Europe. I don't remember this, but it's oh my gosh, so much choice. So much food and so much to see. It's a fun experience to visit, I think. I think they even have tours now.

Katy

I don't think a fish market is always fun because for some reason, the fishermen, they were always quite a funny type of guys and they were always yelling.

Claudia

And they are they are totally and they're like, you want to try it on like it's raw and like, yeah.

Katy

It's from the sea. It's sushi people!

Claudia

Exactly - and they give you all the secrets to better cook. They are the ones that can tell you how to prepare the most amazing dishes. I'm not a chef myself. So when sometimes I go to the market, I buy some fish and then they will tell me, oh, you have to cook it like this - 10 minutes this way, 5minutes this way, put some salt, some of this and they give you the recipe from scratch.

Katy

Fabulous. What more could you want? Fresh fish straight from the sea overlooking the beautiful pink sand beach. My goodness. And I hear you've got some pretty good cheese there too.

Claudia

Yes. Yes. Again, because of we have a lot of sheep, you know, I think we have more sheep than people actually. Sardinia makes some very good pecorino cheese. We have a million kinds from mild to strong to one that made it to I think it may be the CNN world's most dangerous foods, which is not dangerous at all. I can assure you, if it was dangerous, Sardinia would not be one of the region with the highest life expectancies in the world.

Claudia

It's called Casu martzu, which translates into rotten cheese, but it's not rotten. So it's pecorino, which is I think it's laid outside and flies lay their eggs and then the larvae open and then you eat it with the larva and everything. I've never tried. Because it's a very, very, very strong cheese kind of like becomes creamy inside when you open it. But people that try to swear by it is not regularly sold in the in the markets and in the streets, it's I think for obvious reasons. So you kind of like have to scout for it. A few years ago, I had a friend visiting from Israel and he heard of this cheese and he was obsessed. He had to try it. And we literally had to go to the market to every single stand, kind of like asking, where can I find? Casu martzu? Where can I find Casu martzu? And everyone was like, Shuuush - I can tell. They pointed me in the direction of this shepherd who was hiding a little bit under his table. And then he took it out and my friend tried it and he said, well, you know, it's just a very strong pecorino cheese, but nothing completely random. And I wouldn't know why it's it's been marked as one of the world's most dangerous foods because it's not.

Katy

They probably discovered it was that by accident because someone like that cheese out in the sun or something like that.

Claudia

You know, I don't know when it was invented, but I'm 100 percent sure that your your version is actually probably the most accurate one. Like many things in the world.

Katy

Just by accident. OK now Claudia, if we're going to go off on a little bit of a road trip, which we had to when we leave Cagliari.

Claudia

OK, so so I cannot tell you where to go if you don't tell me when you're coming.

Katy

I'm going to come in autumn or fall.

Claudia

OK, so let's say October. So October, depending on the year, can be a good month to actually go to the beach and to start some hikes. So when you leave Cagliari, you can head down to the beaches around Chia or Teulada. That area, they are pristine, long, sandy beaches with clear waters and stuff. There are some coastal hikes that you can do there. And not far from Chia, you will find beautiful archeological sites, di Noro, and then you can drive further north in this region that is called Campidano and visit Su Nuraxi, which is actually Sardinians only UNESCO World Heritage site, although we're pushing to insert more places. So this is a Nuraghe and it's incredibly well kept. You have to do a guided tour. You can just go around the site randomly by yourself. And then from there you can continue to visit the mountains of Sardinia and hike the Gorropu canyon, which is, I think, either the deepest or the second deepest canyon in Europe. And it's a bit of a - depending on the trail you follow - it can be a tough or a tougher hike. I've done it a bunch of times following a bunch of trails. One of them was super hard. One of them was easy. But, you know, it's beautiful. And it's also a great place for rock climbing if you're into that. And then from there, you can drive to a Alghero, which is a Catalan city here in Sardinia, because we speak a variety of languages in Sardinia, obviously Italian, then Sardinian, which is a minority language, and then Catalan, which they speak in this particular city called a Alghero. It's a beautiful, beautiful city. You can visit the Neptune Caves. You can walk around Cape Caccia, which is, I think the best sunsets are from this part of Sardinia. And then you can visit Bosa, which is a bit south of Alghero. And it's a stunning, stunning city.

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Katy

Oh, wow. There's so much to do. So Claudia you mentioned earlier that carnival is really popular. The carnivals are really popular in Sardinia. What can you tell us about those? I love a sagra myself.

Claudia

So we have several villages in the mountains of Sardinia in the Barbagia region celebrate carnival with traditional costumes and traditional rituals. The most popular one is in Mamoiada, where they have masks called Mamuthones. How can I explain what they look like? So men mostly wear this really dark wooden mask. Kind of looking - it's scary to look at. And then they wear black clothes and then on top of it they wear this sheep's. Not skin like literally a fur - sheep's fur, and they go around the village kind of like performing a variety of rituals. My favorite, though, is Sartiglia, which takes place in Oristano, which is one of the main cities in Sardinia. It's about halfway on the western coast of Sardinia. And they again have several rituals. But the most fun thing to watch is the horse race. There is a bunch of people that are fully dressed in costumes and wearing wearing beautifully chiseled masks, and they lead their horses down the street. And with them, I think it's a spear. They have to grab a star with a hole in the middle that is hanging from the two sides of the street. It's adrenaline filled and it's been I think it's been going on for centuries. It's a ritual to celebrate the harvest season or to wish for a good harvest year - one of the two, I don't remember exactly, but it's a lot of fun to watch. And obviously, this is just the peak of the festival. But there's also a bunch of other performances and rituals which are all beautiful to watch.

Claudia

Another... Sardinia's biggest festival celebration, though, is actually not carnival related. It's on first of May and it's celebrated here in Cagliari and it celebrates Sant Ephisius, which is the saint of protecting Sardinia. And it's been going on for more than, I think five or six centuries now, it's been going on since I think 1652 or something like that to celebrate the saint that rid Sardinia of the plague. And imagine it was very important for locals in May 2020 - there still was the celebration, obviously without a parade and everything because of covid. But we kind of hope that he would perform another miracle. So the festival sees representatives of a selection of Sardinian villages parading around the streets of Cagliari in traditional costumes, which are very beautiful, very ornate, and all the way to a village called ,la, where there is a church. The very last step is the statue of the saint that is driven around the streets of the city and all the way to this church, which is about 40 kilometers away on a bull, actually pulled carriage. And then four days later, the saint comes back to town for the celebration. It's a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful festival to see. Obviously, 2021, we also didn't have the celebration, so we're kind of hoping for 2022

Katy

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Yeah, I hope so. It sounds like it could be really a special one that year. Absolutely lovely. Those things are for the unique and special things that I think if you can really seek them out when you're in Italy because yeah, you can have your pizza and you know, I love my gelato (and everyone knows that listens to this show). But it's those moments that you will remember because they are so unique to the different parts of Italy and obviously Sardinia.

Claudia

They are. A lot of people forget that Italy came together as a country only in 1871. So different parts of Italy speak different languages, have different cultures, have unique food, you know, and that's an important thing to understand. And when people tell me they're coming to Italy and spending just like 10 days and they want to see everything, I'm like, yeah, that's not going to happen. And then the other side of the coin, people that come to Italy once and they keep coming again and again and again because they realize there's a lot to see. They realize there's a lot to do. And it quickly becomes their favorite country. I can say I completely understand.

Katy

Well, I mean, there's 20 regions, so you can almost say it's 20 different countries, but there's actually even more if you go deeper into it. Really. Oh, Sardinia sounds absolutely beautiful. And I don't know why I haven't been there, but there's a few places I haven't been to yet. And I missed out on a big trip in 2020, which I'm a bit sad about. But anyway, we'll rectify that soon. But Claudia, I know that you often explore Italy beyond your home in Sardinia. Do you have a favorite place that you love to visit that's not on your island?

Claudia

Oh man. So in terms of city, I have to say Rome is my absolute favorite. I mean, I have goosebumps just saying it - it's just such a special, special place. I love if you ask me what I like the most about it, I think I like the atmosphere. It's a grand city. It's massive. And it's not just massive in terms of size. It's massive in terms of styles.

Katy

It's a presence.

Claudia

Yeah, it's kind of like - it will leave you an impression. It will leave you an impression, so that is definitely my favorite city. If I have to think of nature, probably Trentino with the Dolomites, you know, it's just the landscapes are gorgeous. You know, there's a lot of hikes, there's a lot of skiing. Cities that are not Rome. I went to Matera for the first time last October. Again, Goosebumps. It's an incredible city. And if you have an eye for photography, you're just going to go crazy nuts taking pictures. I loved Puglia. It's just so picture perfect

again. And the food is amazing. The bread. I could have survived on bread for like a week without eating anything else. So these are probably my favorite places. Yeah.

Katy

Oh yeah. And what about in Sardinia? Apart from your apart from Cagliari is there a place that just is your absolute favorite place in Sardinia?

Claudia

Yes, Costa Rei, which is a summer holiday destination. My parents own - my family owns a property. In fact, I'm going there tonight.

Katy

Lucky you.

Claudia

We've been going since I was a child, since I was born, basically. And it's just a gorgeous, long, golden sandy beach with clear waters. It's the kind of place where I arrive, I park my car and I actually even forget I have a car. I just relax so much when I'm there. I love going there in the summertime. I love going there in the winter when there's no one around is just the best of the best to me.

Katy

You know, it sounds perfect. Aren't you lucky going there today. It sounds absolutely divine. Now Claudia. I know that our listeners would love to explore Sardinia. Armed with all your best local advice, how can they follow you and stay up to date with what you're doing?

Claudia

So my website is called Strictly Sardinia, so it's very easy to find. I have an Instagram page and a Facebook page that are also called Strictly Sardinia and I post regularly. You know, there's a lot of material to help you plan. And if you have questions, you can always send me an email or ask me to draft an itinerary for you.

Katy

Oh, that sounds wonderful. Look, I think everyone's going to be wanting to come and visit you in Sardinia very soon. Grazie Claudia. Thank you so much for taking us to beautiful Sardinia today. It's been an absolute pleasure having you join us here.

Claudia

Thank you so much.

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Katy

Pink sand beaches, seafood dishes, sunset vistas and carnivals, Sardinia sounds like my kind of place. It's one of the regions I haven't been to yet and I am just itching to go and discover all this beauty for myself.

I really loved that Claudia showed off her island's attractions outside of the traditional summer season. I think as the world changes and reassesses things after the past 18 months it can be quite liberating to look beyond the obvious to seasons and places that perhaps offer something different, more local and unique.

I'll always champion everyone's right to see and enjoy the classic sights most of us know so well in Italy. After all, they are popular for a reason. But, my challenge to you all is to venture a little outside your comfort zone and discover a hidden nook of Italy that's lesser known but without a doubt will become incredibly special for you. And perhaps that will be Sardinia?

Do you want to explore Sardinia some more with Claudia? Then do head on over to her website *Strictly Sardinia* where she's got tonnes of resources to assist with your trip planning. We do of course have a link to her page and all the places mentioned on the show in our episode show notes at untolditaly.com/83 for episode 83

Now 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. We're steadily climbing the podcast rankings which is so exciting and it's all thanks to you. Grazie! Thanks for listening as always!

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"