

Untold Italy Episode 84 - A self-guided tour of the Amalfi Coast

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 84.

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,

I hope you're all doing well and enjoying life wherever you are. I have absolutely loved seeing and hearing about your trips finally coming into fruition after the longest pause in your emails and in our Italy Travel Planning Facebook group. Keep them coming!

Of course over in our Untold Italy Insiders private online piazza it's been such a joy seeing our friends in Italy finally welcome guests back to their special parts of Italy with open arms and big hearts on our regular live chats. We've loved our special tour of Holly and Gianluca's garden in Capri and hearing all about Liv's experiences in Verona going to see the opera last month.

In August our members are learning about Pinot Grigio wine, taking a magical virtual trip to Venice and discovering the secrets of Trastevere. It's going to be so much fun and we'd love to see you there. As we wait to return or finally go to Italy it really is the most fun and best place to learn about all those insider secrets that make your time in Italy so special.

To learn all about how you can sign up to Untold Italy Insiders head on over to untolditaly.com/insiders for all the details.

So onto today's episode where we are heading back to one of your favorite spots - the Amalfi Coast! Now for most of us, a trip to Italy is a major endeavour both in terms of time and money. Did you know that takes over 24 hours door to door to get to Rome from where I am in Australia, so it's no surprise that when we get there, we want to really make the most of it and perhaps celebrate an occasion.

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Now more than ever I think the time is right to do that. I'd always dreamed of an Italian wedding but even though my husband's family is Italian, for a variety of reasons - including living in Australia - it wasn't possible at the time. So now I am scheming a milestone birthday celebration of my very own in a few years time. It involves a huge villa, my family and friends and feasting for hours - I haven't decided where yet - I keep changing my mind. But that's about as perfect as it gets for me

Everyone is different though and our guest today decided she wanted to celebrate her 50th birthday on the stunning Amalfi Coast. Karen Salter fell in love with Italy in her 20s and despite a few trips back since then these birthday celebrations helped her reconnect with Italy in the most beautiful way. I'll let her tell you all about it.

Katy

Benvenuti Karen! Ciao and welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Karen

Thanks, Katy. How are you?

Katy

I am great. I'm great. It's so great to have you here. Now, Karen - we are going to be talking about your wonderful trip to celebrate your milestone birthday to the Amalfi Coast. But I thought first we could hear a little bit about you and your background and how you came to fall in love with Italy.

Karen

Yeah, sure. Well, I was a design student in the 90s and went on a travel - well, I was always passionate about art and design and went on a study tour to Italy and went to quite a few places there and just sort of fell in love. I mean, I love the whole idea of Europe altogether. And then when I was a backpacker in the 90s, early 90s, I ended up learning Italian in Florence for a month and staying for a bit longer. And then that was basically when I decided, oh, this is the love of my life, really. Don't tell my husband that!

Katy

You know, I feel the same way. But then I went on to marry an Italian as you know!

Karen

Well, I tried. I tried, but it just didn't work.

Katy

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So you were in Florence and it must have been a really magical time for you and obviously made a huge impact on your life. And I know you just kept dreaming of Italy didn't you?

Karen

I did. I did. I had really wanted to stay in Italy and had met lots of local people. In Firenze and I sort of was trying to work out ways of staying, but just the other things in my life, I couldn't stay. So I came home and ended up spending the next oh my God, it was until 2014 - hadn't been to Italy for various reasons and then it was the right time to return. And so I took my husband who hadn't even been to Europe ever. So, yeah, that was sort of blew my mind. And our two young boys and we went to England and France and then we did a sort of a whistle stop tour of Italy, Venice for two nights, and then Florence and Rome. And actually I just thought, oh, I love it. I still love it. It might be much busier because I like insane how much busier it is compared to when I was first there. So then for my 50th birthday, I said to my husband, what I really want to do is go to the Amalfi Coast. So we organized (well, I organized) a trip for him and I to go. So this is the first time we were away from our kids for two weeks or something. So, yeah, we did it.

Katy

Oh, that's so exciting. And I know, like I think it's a really important thing to mark these milestone birthdays with something absolutely fabulous. And you really chose something amazing. Now, what really intrigued me when you wrote me a beautiful emblazoned with lemons, by the way, everyone.

Karen

Yes. I thought, well - that's the artist in me.

Katy

Was that Karen chose to do a self-guided walking trip in the Amalfi Coast. And I think this is really different and unusual and I really wanted our listeners to hear from you about these trip. So I was wondering what interests shaped this trip? Why did you choose to do this type of trip?

Karen

Well, I personally could walk around cities and go to cafes and restaurants and art galleries and museums and I would be very happy. And gardens - I love gardens and I do love nature. But my husband is very active, physically active, and I sort of wanted to choose something to do that we could do together that would cater to that sort of love of the outdoors and walking - activity really to keep moving. So, we like the idea of a self-guided tour because we didn't want to be bound by the tour group scenario. And we were sort of confident we could do it, although.. and we did it, we did it. And we used a great company that actually we

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didn't have to carry all our bags. So that's the reason why I guess I chose to do it self-guided, but it was organized. All the accommodation and moving our luggage was organized by the actual tour company.

Katy

Oh, that sounds very civilized. I like this idea.

Karen

Yeah.

Katy

So maybe you can talk us through the itinerary. First of all, how so, how many days was it in the Amalfi Coast?

Karen

So there was actually the actual itinerary of the walking tour was five nights. So we were getting met in Salerno, which is sort of a major town south of the Amalfi Coast, I guess, at the start of the Amalfi Coast. And so they had a driver to pick us up and then take us to Ravello, where we were going to start walking the next day. The idea was to walk every day and stay at a different place every night.

Katy

Oh, that sounds lovely. And how much walking would that be? Each day, roughly?

Karen

We had options to do sort of shorter walks or longer walks. I can't remember distance wise but the first walk, which was meant to be from Ravello to Amalfi, was about five hours of walking, maybe between 10 to 15 kilometers.

Katy

Wow. That's a decent walk. And I hope it was downhill because that's a very steep - I've driven up there and I wouldn't want to walk up there.

Karen

Yeah, well, we actually we walked from Ravello - well, you could have actually you can go on a shorter walk that had an option for shorter walk, which was just down the stairs, sort of more of a straight down hour and a half walk. But we thought we really liked the idea of going through the Valle delle Ferriere. I think it's called. It's like a national park. It's very, very kind of rugged. The paths weren't rugged, but the landscape was quite rugged, sort of

going away from the sea. So it was really interesting. And then also, like in the beginning, from Ravello to Scala, which was it's a town just on from Ravello, we walked through, you know past beautiful lemon groves and houses and farms and what have you. And then we got into this quite like a bush, what we call a bushwalk in Australia.

Katy

Yeah.

Karen

Yeah. So very nature. Nature walk. None of that walk was very uphill. No, but. And then eventually downhill.

Katy

And would you say at the start were you feeling confident that you could do it and how did you think you'd have to be and where do you think you were prepared?

Karen

Well, you had to have quite a good level of fitness. Both of us are always exercising, but not crazily. But I guess keeping a good level of fitness. We did do - and I did in particular - tried to walk extra before I left. And it was all pretty much on paths. And, you know, it's not like rock climbing, mountain climbing or anything like that.

Katy

You didn't need your karabiners to get to scramble up a rock or anything like that?

Karen

And also the tour company gave us maps and directions as well. So a little booklet with directions. But I guess the one thing we weren't really prepared for was that I hadn't really sorted out a GPS just in case we got lost or what we were doing because we got lost. And on the first day we got lost!!!!

Katy

Oh no!!

Karen

And it started raining. And we're in this forest and we're going we don't know. We should have seen the old farmhouse by now. So we actually did panic a little bit and thought we were going to spend the night in the forest. Because actually - the mistake that we made was that

we had started the walk too late in the day because there were things to say in Ravello. There was a market on and you know, you've got to look at the market.

Katy

Of course.

Karen

There was a building I wanted to have a look at and stuff like that. So, yeah. So I guess I would start the walk earlier and be prepared with - at least know how to read a map properly. I mean I'm good with directions, but when you get into the forest and we didn't realize that we should be following these sort of the red and white markers or whatever, so anyway, it all sort of worked out. We managed to find our way. Because we freaked out more than we were lost, if you know what I mean.

Katy

Yeah.

Karen

Like we were on paths and we could actually see the sea. But, you know, was just quite daunting to think, how do we get there?

Katy

Oh, my goodness. I can tell you now - it is - it is scary. I don't think you can do too much preparation sometimes. It's a really interesting thing. I mean, I think probably all the listeners would know I'm a bit of a type A control freak when it comes to planning, but it's important. And like you said something to me. But the other thing that I do love about the story is that you figured it out and everything was fine.

Karen

Well, we really did have a moment of panic because it was sort of three or four o'clock in the afternoon and it had started raining, not pouring, but it was raining. So not perfect conditions. And we couldn't really get any reception on the phone.

Katy

Oh, yes.

Karen

So we did find a place to get reception and then rang the person from the tour company. And they couldn't really help. They couldn't really help us too much because we didn't know where

the GPS was. And I think maybe one of our phones was, of course, running out of battery or something. In that way we were a bit unprepared because I think we assumed that it would be incredibly clear which way to go, but. It wasn't. It probably was, but we probably..

Katy

Well you get caught up in the moment as well. And like, you know, Ravello is so beautiful, there's no doubt that you would get caught up in that beautiful place. And it's really it's just I think people often miss Ravello, because it is it's a little bit further south, but it's an absolutely stunning place, isn't it?

Karen

It's it is absolutely stunning. Beautiful village. And we went - so we got there the day before we started walking and we went to Villa Cimbrone the oh, the villa, which actually we didn't really see the villa itself, the hotel. But the gardens are just extraordinary, especially for the view over the Tyrrhenian sea. And it was a beautiful day. So it was the perfect - it was our first day on the Amalfi Coast. And we stood on that cliff overlooking the sea and you could see Capri in the distance and so magnificent and blue, the blue of the sea.

Katy

Yeah. You can't really - it's a definite color of blue isn't it - azure!! It's just bright and stunning. What time of year was it, Karen?

Karen

Oh, so we went mid-May so springtime. And so we generally had good weather, but they were some rainy day, so it was a bit cool for my liking. I like it a bit warmer. So but we didn't want to go obviously in the height of summer. And when the Amalfi Coast was really busy. So - and May suited us, I think next time I'd like to maybe go sort of end of summer when it's still warm but not as busy.

Katy

Yeah, it would be beautiful. Then you can just you've done all the walking so you can just relax then.

Karen

Yeah. That's true.

Katy

Although there are so many amazing, amazing walks in that area, it is really a stunning part of the world to go hiking in. So you ended up in Amalfi on the first night of the walk and

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Amalfi you know, it doesn't get the I guess, the celebrations that Positano has, but it is a lovely town. I really like it. And yeah. What were your impressions?

Karen

Well, look, I mean, we got there quite late. Well, maybe, you know, five o'clock or something. We were just glad to get there. And the good thing about the self guided tour was that we had our accommodation waiting for us and our luggage and a very nice hotel overlooking the water - well down on the waterfront actually. And Amalfi is really - it's gorgeous. I think it's gorgeous, but it's obviously it's not as spectacular as some of the other towns. But we had dinner in front of the Duomo there and I bought some beautiful handmade paper so that they make because that's the tradition there of making handmade paper. They used to be a lot of paper mills. So, yeah, I think Amalfi - I think we were just glad to get there.

Katy

I can imagine. You probably would have been starving as well. Because you've been up on that hill for five hours.

Karen

Yeah, well, I can't even remember. You see that's the thing. I've blocked out the food situation, although my husband is really good at organizing food. Like when our kids were smaller when we went out just like locally, he'd prepare all the food. So we did have food. We had a good amount of snacks with us, food and snacks with us. So we were definitely prepared with that. I think we were totally starving when we got to Amalfi. And to be honest, I remember where we sat, but I have no idea what we ate. It is a few years ago now.

Katy

That's OK. I mean, it is just it is a beautiful environment, that little piazza there. And there's actually a really good cake shop there. That's what I was. Oh, so maybe the next time.

Karen

Yeah.

Katy

And then the next day he continued on your trek.

Karen

Yes. Next day was really nice weather and we went on - it was a much more accessible walk, I guess it was through the farms sort of and lemon groves and so through rural area on stone

pathways to this gorgeous little hamlet, I guess it's called. It can't even recall any shops there, really. Conca dei Marini and stayed at this also this hotel that had my dream kind of pool - the pool that is on the cliff overlooking the sea. So - it wasn't super warm. But we did manage to lie by the pool for an hour or so and get a bit of sun and

Katy

Soak up the views!

Karen

Yeah, but it wasn't really hot enough for that.

Katy

I guess it depends on what you're used to. We can get some pretty hot days here and but I think it would be around 20 degrees Celsius probably at that time of year or maybe even a little bit cooler.

Karen

Yeah, it could be a bit cooler. I mean it sort of fluctuated. But when the sun comes out. Yeah, it's around 20 degrees Celsius. Yeah.

Katy

Which is probably great for walking, but maybe not for sun lounging.

Karen

No, no.

Katy

Conca dei Marini - like it's a beautiful little town and it's just gorgeous. Again, not many people go there.

Karen

No. And that night we went for dinner, we walked down through the sort of little houses and it was so quiet because at that time of year seemed very quiet. Not many people around. And we walked down to the little beach there and there was a restaurant there. So it was actually just us at this restaurant on the beach. So that was gorgeous, too.

Katy

Beautiful. In fact, you know, you can it can be there. And I don't know what it was like when you go to Positano, whether it was busy. But you can be like these smaller towns, they don't get a lot of traffic, actually, because most people stick to the main - stick to Amalfi and they stick to Positano. So there's all these little gems waiting to be discovered that if you just go a little bit out of your way or you do a little walking tour like this one, then you can find them and have these beautiful, sort of serene experience enjoying the beautiful coastline.

Karen

Exactly. Exactly. It was just - it was perfect, really. It's really beautiful.

Katy

Now, tell us a little bit about this company, because it sounds like it's is a really great way. I like the idea of not carrying stuff everywhere and then having it a little bit luxe, but having that walking nature experience at the same time. What was their name?

Karen

Their names Hidden Italy. It's an Australian company, and I just found them online just as I was researching walking tours of Amalfi and ended up liking the sound of them. And it's not a cheap thing to do, but it was reasonably priced compared to some - I was looking at American companies and English companies, but everything happened the way it should have. Maybe. I think the maps that we got, we got a really good geographical map that they sent. The booklet we found a little bit confusing, I guess, to follow. But generally all ok and they have a contact person in Italy. Oh, actually, I think they've got several. But for our tour, we had a contact person's name and she was really lovely. We didn't meet her, but she followed up. Did we get there? She was just worried about us when we were lost.

Katy

After the phone call. But I mean, I think that's really important as well, because, you know, I've been lost here in Australia and it's you kind of know what to do. But when you're in another country, you're lost. It's a bit scary because especially if you don't speak the language fluently, it's good to have a contact point I think.

Karen

Yeah, she was she was very good, actually. And they organized you know, we had a car waiting for us when we got off the train in Salerno - for them to take us to Ravello. And in between there was another place I really wanted to stop at and see another town. And they said, yeah, sure, no problem. So the driver took us there. And then we went on to Ravello. And then on the way back, we finished our tour after five days - with Hidden Italy. But then we went over to Capri and they even on our way back, picked us up from Naples, after we've

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gotten off the ferry, that I'd organized and the Hidden Italy driver gave us a lift to the station.

Katy

Oh, that was lovely.

Karen

Yes, so they were really good like that. It just made it because my husband I love walking and doing those walks. But, you know, I don't want to be carrying seven kilo backpack or 10 kilo backpack. I can't do that.

Katy

No one wants that on a beautiful Italian holiday. And plus, it sounds like you did a bit of shopping on the way, Karen. So..

Karen

I didn't do too much shopping. But I do like to buy. Actually, I've listened to you before and I do like to buy something that's special from the place that I go to so.

Katy

I know you visited the ceramics factory.

Karen

Oh, yes, this is the place I wanted to stop at between Salerno and Ravello. It's called Vietri Sul Mare.

Katy

Yep. Vietri Sul Mare

Karen

Yeah it's a gorgeous town. But there was this actually ceramics factory that I wanted to stop at because it was a crazy looking building that I'd seen on the Internet that I wanted to - actually more to see the building than the ceramics. Although the ceramics are gorgeous, but the building, I always forget how to say it in Italian Ceramica Solimene. Beautiful, like a really interesting building decorated with the ceramics built in the 1950s, and it's their factory. And so we stop there. The building's worth seeing and the ceramics are really those typical Amalfi Coast ceramics. It's gorgeous. I just kept taking photos, you know, my husband and the driver were like "how many, how many photos can she take?"

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Katy

You can take a lot and I'm sure you took heaps on this trip. Thousands I imagine. I've actually got, like I think about two hundred thousand photos of Italy - I'm not joking.

Karen

Oh, that's incredible.

Katy

It's embarrassing. I need to sort through them, actually, if anyone knows of anyone who's volunteering to sort out photos!

Karen

I know. Well, I take photos, I take a lot of photos of buildings because I have a passion for design. And I also take a lot of photos of beautiful flowers. And animals like we saw the cutest puppy dogs and goats as we're walking.

Katy

Oh Karen you know my thing about baby goats. Don't you? I have a thing for baby goats!

Karen

Then you definitely have to go walking in the Amalfi Coast, especially. The best walk that we did was the highlight was the Sentiero degli Dei and that was from between Praiano and Positano. And it's the Pathway of the Gods and it truly is. And there were tons of goats there. Goats on these incredible rocky mounds that you don't even know how - can't even understand how they could climb up there.

Katy

Oh, I know. They were pretty amazing. Now, this is a really popular walk to do and you don't have to do it like it's not a multi day walk is it?

Karen

No

Katy

You can do it in one day. And how did you find it?

Karen

Well, actually, we wanted to do it the way that we were meant to do it, we'd actually had to go back to do it because the day of our tour, it was raining and it was just not a day to do it. And the next day was perfect weather. So we actually started in Praiano, which is another small town just before Positano, and we walked up and up and up, really high!! Because Praiano is quite close to the - well, actually, it's still above the sea, but not as far as the Pathway of the Gods. So we started in Praiano, so we had a lot like about an hour uphill walk.

Katy

Oh!

Karen

Yeah. But you don't have to do that because you can go from ..

Katy

Is it Nocelle?

Karen

I think you walk to Nocelle. Is it - Bomerano.

Katy

Yea Bomerano.

Karen

Bomerano is where you start if you don't want to do that big uphill walk. We wanted to do it because we thought it would be interesting and it was. It was amazing because as we were walking we saw a man tending his garden and I speak a little bit of Italian. And so I said, all your garden's beautiful. And we started talking. And then I asked him (because we knew we were sort of like this close to the start of the walk) Did he know where I could go to the restroom and he said, no, no, there's nothing around here. And by the end of it, he took us up to his special little summer garden with a little summer house. And he let me use his bathroom and showed us a beautiful tree with lots of different things hanging off it, like little teacups and shiny things.

Karen

And, oh, it was incredible. So so that was actually a very special non touristy kind of experience. And then once we made it up to join onto the pathway of the gods, it became a lot busier. On the way up, we saw no one. And then so we sort of met at just past Bomerano, I think. And then it became quite busy compared to all the other walking that we'd done. But

absolutely stunning. It's breathtaking. It's one of the best things I've ever done in my life is so beautiful.

Katy

So it took an hour to get up from Praiano up to Bomerano.

Karen

Yeah.

Katy

And so from there you walk down to Positano. And had you seen Positano yet? Or you hadn't seen it yet?

Karen

Well, firstly, we stayed a night in Praiano and that - where we stayed the hotel, we had a view, a little balcony and a view across to Positano. So that was pretty stunning. And then the day we were meant to do the walk, it was raining. So we actually went into Positano and had a look around and we stayed the night there. And so when we came back, we'd already been there, if you know what I mean.

Katy

Yeah, because of the rain.

Karen

Because of the rain, we sort of backtracked, I guess, on our walking. So we sort of ended up catching some transport to Positano on the day that we were meant to walk there, spent the night there. And then the next day we got the bus back to Praiano, walked up to the Pathway of the Gods, and then we ended up not walking all the way into Positano because we needed to catch the last ferry to Capri. So we finished the walk in Nocelle and then got the bus down to Positano.

Katy

Oh, OK. Wow. And so it was one of the best days of your life. It was like this amazing experience. And how hard is the walk? Because I know a lot of people are interested in doing it, but they might actually - they might find it might be a bit too hard for them.

Karen

I think you definitely need to have a good level of fitness. I may not be Superman, but you know good level fitness and be kind of stable, all used to walking on sort of uneven path. We did take walking poles with us.

Katy

OK.

Karen

But there were a lot of people doing that walk, they hadn't walked up the hill. Walked up an hour and done days before us. And so there were other people sort of just walking along. But the path can get quite narrow and very steep looking down. I mean, it's very high up. But I mean, I guess if you've got - if you're really worried about heights, it might be challenging, but it's not like you're clinging to the edge or anything like that. That was the whole good thing about having the all the accommodation organized and not carrying your bags so we could, you know, enjoy the walking and then also enjoy being in a nice hotel and in a nice, beautiful town. But that walk, the views were just really to die for. I mean, incredible. The countryside is really green and the water is that incredible blue. And then you see Positano, which is fabulous.

Katy

And there's a reason why it's on the UNESCO World Heritage list. It is actually spectacular. So beautiful and what a way to finish that day to get the ferry across to Capri. Oh my goodness.

Karen

I know. And actually it was like we had a private boat because there was only because it was obviously it wasn't the height of summer, I was early spring and we were catching the ferry over at the end of the day when most people would be catching the ferry from Capri back - there was just us and two other passengers, these young Italian boy, the young Italian men and us and the crew on this quite large ferry. So that was like having your own private motor yacht?

Karen

Well not really, but it was pretty good.

Katy

I love it. Well, I mean, in fact, my friend Holly, who lives on Capri, she actually suggests that people stay on Capri and, you know, do the reverse day trips because most people do the day trip from Positano to Capri the other way around. But yeah, you stay on Capri, which Holly also suggests the three nights. And tell us a little bit about that, because I know people would love to hear that.

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Karen

Well, I guess I'd always seen images of Capri. Glamorous images from the 1950s, 60s and 70s of, you know, of glamorous people and living the life like that. So I really - was somewhere that I always wanted to go to. Plus the landscape itself. I just love - there's something about the rocky landscape with the green and the blue sea - just so attractive to me. So we could have continued with Hidden Italy and got them to book us on Capri and do more walking on Capri, but we decided to get an Airbnb or that kind of thing, and it was gorgeous. Sort of accommodation in a more rural area. Sort of just outside of Anacapri which is the town up on the hill, not Capri town.

Katy

Yeah - n the other side, yep.

Karen

Anyway - what it was - we wanted to do, something a little less fancy than staying right in Capri town. And we stayed in this gorgeous property. The woman who owned the property and her husband lived there in a house, sort of further down the hill. And we stayed overlooking the sea we had a beautiful terraza, you know terrace. So we could actually, because after you've been traveling for a while, we kind of like to be able to make our own food, not eat out every night, and also just to kick back and relax a bit. So it was great. It was great. The only disappointment there was that we thought we could use - there was one day that was really warm and they had a sunbaking terrace on the roof of where we were staying. But the pool wasn't open yet for the summer. So that's something I think is quite common.

Katy

Yeah it is - they don't open them often until maybe mid-May or late May or June. So you have to sort of check those. It's called a seasonal pool, but I guess there's a lot of maintenance that goes around it, so they choose not to do that so much. But yeah. What were some of your favorite things to do on Capri? Coz it is such a beautiful place.

Karen

Well, one of the funniest things was going to the Blue Grotto because we were staying quite close to the Blue Grotto and we really did want to sea it. So we walked - we actually walked there then had to line up on some steps, sort of on the rocks going down to the Blue Grotto and at the same time watching all these other boats and people trying to go into the Blue Grotto, which is, you know, in those rowing boats, and you have to duck down depending on the tide. Yes, it was just a funny thing. And then we waited for about half an hour or something to get in a boat. Then you go into the Blue Grotto and you're squashed into this

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boat with other people you don't know, which would never happen now, with covid, then you're in the Blue Grotto, but there's a hundred other boats in there and all the different captains of the boats are all trying to sing and do this - it was just it was crazy. And our boat man was not very nice. But then at the end he really expected my husband to give him - us, to give him a tip. But he'd been so grumpy and not very nice. And my husband wanted to/was trying to get his backpack out of the boat and the man wouldn't pass it to him until he gave him a tip. Oh my goodness. It was just - it was it would have been magnificent once upon a time, I think, to go into the Blue Grotto. But I think it's one of those places that are really.

Katy

Like it's a bit overdone.

Karen

Yeah. Yeah. And we weren't there even in the height of summer. So I can imagine in the height of summer, it must be insane.

Katy

Yeah. And it's an interesting thing because actually all around, I don't know if you get to go on a boat trip around the island, but there's actually heaps of little grottos that you can go in like there's the Emerald Grotto, I think the White Grotto. And so, I mean, I actually haven't been in the Blue Grotto because the tides weren't right and the seas were a bit too choppy on the day that we were there. But yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? Maybe these different places you can explore that you get maybe a similar experience that don't have that sort of ticket on them, so to speak.

Karen

I think so. I mean, it is the color was really stunning, but it was a bit of a crazy experience. We had gone to, there's an emerald grotto near Conca dei Marini and so we had gone there and it's very much quieter, obviously not blue like the Blue Grotto, but still pretty stunning.

Katy

Yeah

Karen

But on Capri I think the other thing we did, which was really great, was catch a - we had enough walking, so we caught the chairlift up to Monte Solaro, I think it is the and you get an incredible view of the Faraglioni Rocks and all over Anacapri and Capri and, and the chairlift is basically very old fashioned.

Katy

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I couldn't do it. I'm not good with heights.

Karen

Oh really? One person, one person per chair and - but it's gorgeous to see you actually go over farms and the homes of Anacapri so that was pretty great. So although the weather wasn't - we sort of managed to get a view of the Faraglioni Rocks and then the cloud, we were covered in cloud, actually.

Katy

Right. I mean, it is quite high up, isn't it? Yeah, it's a mountain, so.

Karen

Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Katy

Oh, now listen, you also went to one of my favorite places Carthusia, to get some perfume.

Karen

(gasps) Oh!!!

Katy

So this is a beautiful perfumery and they make some absolutely - if you like perfume, this is where to go. And this is - I wear my Fiori di Capri perfume every day to just to take me to Capri.

Karen

Absolutely. I put mine on this morning because we were going to be speaking today. It was incredible - that. It's the most beautiful store. So we went one day into Capri town and then we went to the Agusutus... What's that?

Katy

Giardini di Augusto, yeah they're the gardens.

Karen

Yeah. Giardini di Augusto. And found Carthusia on the way or the way back. They had you tried it on different perfumes. And it was all so beautiful. I just didn't know which way to go because in the end I did buy the Fiori di Capri or whatever, the special Capri fragrance and I bought some beautiful as presents, some beautiful lemon lemon shaped soaps and..

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Katy

Oh and even the packaging is gorgeous.

Karen

The packaging - I actually we went in 2016, but I literally still had the box because I couldn't throw it away - from the perfume. I hung onto it because, because it is so stunning.

Katy

Everything about it. They just put so much care and attention into everything that they do. And I just think it's it's one of those really special things about Italy that just makes it even more magical to me anyway. Oh, Karen, that sounds like the most amazing way to celebrate a milestone birthday. I think you did a very good job of celebrating. Congratulations to you.

Karen

Thank you.

Katy

Were you happy with it all?

Karen

Oh yeah. I think the only thing I would change would be next time I'd do it in slightly warmer weather and more time. That's the other thing is that we saw a lot, but there's never enough time. You know, I would have liked maybe two days in each place and and walk one day and explore one day. But next time. Hopefully.

Katy

Next time - well where will you go to next? As soon as we can.

Karen

Well, as soon as we can. I think Florence is really a place close to my heart, so I'd definitely go there. But then I really want to explore some more Italian beaches. So I like the sound of the Maremma in Tuscany, the Tuscan beaches. I have been to a beach there years ago, you know, 30 years ago. But I can't decide Katy. And also, there's too many places, too many places, especially since I've been listening to all these Italian podcasts about Italy. And I don't know, I think Florence and then Sicily and some other beaches in between. I mean, Puglia, you know, and then I have never been to the Lake District, the lakes.

Katy

So it sounds like you need to just block off a year and just go.

Karen

Well, my youngest son will be finished school in a year and then I'm hoping I can do something like that.

Katy

Job done so. Celebration.

Karen

Exactly.

Katy

Karen. This has been such a lovely chat and I know our listeners would love to connect with you. How could they do that if they wanted to show?

Karen

Well, something we haven't spoken about at all is that I'm an artist. I have an Instagram [karensalterart](#). That is really an Instagram page for my artwork. But I post other things occasionally on there as well, but mostly my paintings or I've got a website link still working on my website six years later that links to [www.karensalter.com](#) that links to a Facebook page that also sort of has my artwork on it. But any questions? I'm always happy to talk about Italy.

Katy

It's so amazing. Did you manage to actually do any painting while you were initially at all?

Karen

I did a bit of drawing, but it was really because - we had - I think it was less than two weeks and on the move pretty much all the time, and especially once you come for (I'd actually had a week before my husband got there), so I'd recovered a little bit from the jetlag coming from Australia. But, he really had to hit the ground running. So it was very fast and not a lot of time because we didn't want to leave our kids for too long. And so, no, I did drawings, but, you know, the occasional drawing. But that's about all. One of the other things I just would dearly love to do is do an artist's residency in Italy. Painting in Italy.

Katy

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Sounds amazing to me. Oh, my goodness. You don't have to wait till next milestone birthday for that one.

Karen

No, hopefully - next year?

Katy

Let's hope so. Grazie. Thank you Karen. It's been so much fun talking about your amazing birthday trip. I think it's a great idea. Everyone find yourself a milestone birthday trip or even a non milestone one, I think it's a great idea. Thank you so much, Karen.

Karen

It's a pleasure. Thank you Katy Ciao.

Katy

What a way to celebrate! I love this trip because Karen really shaped it into something that took in all her interests and her husband's too. As I said at the start of the show, traveling to Italy is a major endeavour for most of us so it's really important to do what you want to do. If you're not into museums and art, that's fine. There are so many interesting outdoor sports and experiences too.

Of course there are the highlights that are popular for a reason but you can also find ways to indulge your at home passions too. I had a reader whose hobby is woodworking ask me where he could buy artisan made woodworking tools in Italy. How amazing and yes of course there are many historic crafts that continue to this day where those type of tools are in use. So it was a delight to point him in the right direction.

If you love perfumes and scents there are places in Florence where you can make your own with some of the world's finest ingredients and if you're a gelato lover like me there's even the gelato university and museum where you can visit and make your own.

So whatever you're celebrating in Italy, even if it is simply life itself, make sure you seek out the experiences you think will make your trip truly magical.

For information and details of Karen's trip you can find them in the show notes at untolditaly.com/84. And I've also put details of a similar group trip experience for those of you interested in hiking the Amalfi Coast like she did.

And if you loved this episode, we would really appreciate it if you gave us a rating or review on your favorite podcast app.. This helps us to reach more Italy lovers just like you and help them dream, plan and escape to Italy wherever they are in the world.

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That's all for this week, next week we're heading back to the mountains!

But until then it's "ciao for now"

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