

Untold Italy Episode 87 - The Story of the Venetian Gondola

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 87.

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

Benvenuti! Ciao! Welcome everyone, are you ready to head to the beautiful, incomparable city of Venice with me today?

Those of you who have been listening to this podcast for a little while will know that Venice is my favorite of all the Italian cities, it's not a secret actually. I talk about it a lot but it's because there's something truly magical and mysterious about this most unique of cities.

And if there is one thing that symbolises Venice more than anything else it's a gondola. You can't even imagine the city without thinking of these shiny black boats and the lean oarsmen (and women!) who navigate them across the canals of the city in their stripey tops and black trousers.

I wanted to find out more about gondolas so I invited my friend and Untold Italy Insiders guide Elisabetta Amadi to talk about them with me on the podcast today. Elisabetta is a true Venetian who was born and bred in Venice and still lives there today, very close to one of the boat yards where gondolas are built and repaired.

She is a licensed guide in the city of Venice and is lots of fun. In this episode you're going to learn all about the history, stories and legends of the gondola and the incredible amount of work it takes to produce such a magnificent vessel. She's also got some amazing tips on where and how to ride in one.. Which you absolutely must do when you're in La Serenissima, the city of Venice. So, andiamo! let's get started!

Katy

Ciao! Benvenuta. And welcome to the Untold Italy Travel podcast Elisabetta!

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Elisabetta

Buongiorno, buongiorno Katy. I'm so glad we managed to talk. And I'm happy that finally I get to share some of my information about Venice and maybe myself with you and your guests today, talking from Venice that is boiling, boiling, boiling heat. Hoping for some rain to come very soon, Katy.

Katy

Oh, I crossed fingers for that. It's actually such a thrill to be talking to you in Venice today, and I can't wait to hear all about the beautiful gondolas of Venice, but perhaps you can share a little bit about yourself with our listeners first.

Elisabetta

Of course, of course, of course. Katy, So I was a daughter of my mother, Franca, and my father, Gianpaolo. They are two families that have lived a long time here in Venice. We have certain information from my father's side, so - his family has been here for about 500 years. They were coming from the central part of Italy, probably Tuscany, before settling into Venice. They've always been doing different kinds of activities. They've been mainly in textiles, and then they went into boat making, later on. There is still one branch of the family that is building boats at present. My mom's side is instead the more artistic part of the family. They have always been in painting. So they have been literally painting, decorating furniture and also restoring paintings. Now, sadly enough, inside that part of the family, we think that somehow the artistic side, it's struggling a little bit. We only have a couple of young cousins that have managed to stay into paintings and hopefully they will stay because as you know I am doing totally different and at the moment, I have so I have studied in Venice. I studied languages, and I went living abroad for nearly twelve years to be able to just get a little better in my English. I came back approximately in the year 2000 when I decided that I was tired enough in living in cold and rainy London, and I prefer to come back here to just enjoy my city and my family in particular. So this is just a little bit about myself, Katy.

Katy

Oh, thank you. And now you're a licensed tour guide in Venice. Right? So it's really important for our listeners to know because it's actually quite difficult to become tour guide. And so you had to do quite a lot of study, didn't you?

Elisabetta

Yes, yes, Katy exactly. So I have to tell you that since I left London, I decided to go into tourism. Already in London, I used to work on the organization side of tourism. When I came back here, I found it quite, let's say, natural to go on to more practical part of taking - literally taking people around. I firstly started to lead European tours and then slowly, slowly from Europe. I went only to Italy. So I was taking people around Italy. And then I decided to

try to specialize in my city and trying to specialize it wasn't that easy because there is always quite a lot of studies to do. And I have to say I'm probably lucky because Italy doesn't have the history that, for example, Rome can have. So I had to study, but it was maybe 1500 years of history instead of 2500.

Katy

Oh is that all? And your family's only been there for 500 or it?

Elisabetta

Yeah,

Katy

It's amazing! Oh, you're so lucky to live there. And I absolutely adore your city. Elisabetta and I could talk about it for hours, but I thought today we'd have a chat about the city's most enduring icon, which is the gondola and why it's so special. So can you tell us a bit about the history of this beautiful boat? And there's always been gondolas in Venice?

Elisabetta

The gondola is always quite interesting symbol. So, you know, we have gondolas for centuries. It's always been the mean of transportation of today, of course, but the past it's the typical, the iconic symbol of Venice. And yes, in the past, they looked quite different from what they are right now. Now do we have already gondolas mentioned from about 1200. So we know that from quite very past that we've had that gondola mentioned. But then we have something that is definitely quite striking for us, which are paintings. Of course, we don't have pictures of the gondolas, but we have paintings, paintings that are going back to Gentile Bellini. If anyone has ever heard, you might be able to google Gentile Bellini or Carpaccio. They had these paintings which contain some beautiful views of gondolas of the time, of course, because, you know, nowadays they are definitely quite different. So let's say if we start from the twelfth century, slowly, slowly we start having as a variation of the gondola, because what we see in the very first painting that definitely can be compared to what we have nowadays, they're definitely quite different nowadays. We think about gondolas as this black, kind of slim, sort of curved, sort of nearly a banana shape boat. And we do have only a Gondolier that usually rows the gondolas. Now, if we think about what we've had in the past and we are looking at something that is quite a little bit different, because back in the past, the gondola used to be a little bit - let's see how I can explain to you this without showing you a picture - but it was much flatter. So it's not a banana shape that we have right now. It's flatter, always with a flat bottom, because the lagoon that we have in Venice is shallower in certain areas, but maybe deeper in certain others. So we want to be sure that the gondola would go quite fast, and that's how you see it nowadays, sort of going very fast on the surface of the water. So the variations of a gondola now, first of all, so we've mentioned nowadays we only have one rower. In the past, at least until the 1800s, you could have had probably

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two gondoliers, or sometimes you would have had even more than two gondoliers and something else that it's quite different. You don't definitely see nowadays on the gondola is something that we actually called 'felze'. Is that spelled F-E-L-Z-E or if I can find an English word, I can call it like a canopy. It's like something that would cover up the passengers of the gondola. It was something that would protect the passenger, protect from, of course, the weather, the sun in particular, or maybe even the rain. But not only that, there was some people that might want to protect themselves, even from other people, the eyes of other people. They want the intimacy, and they might want to possibly be going to different places of the city without really been seen from other people, which I find this quite interesting, Katy, Because that tells you quite a lot of the people that we might have had during the 16, 17 and 18 hundreds.

Katy

Yes, I love a good mystery story. Sounds very interesting.

Elisabetta

Absolutely, Katy, and it's exactly how you would expect. You know, we've had people going from houses to houses. Or maybe you would have people going from houses to something else that we used to call casino or Ridotto, which is, you know, an image perfectly the idea of a gondola and a felze so you would protect your identity when you were going, for example, to a gambling house, and you didn't want many people to know that you were off to a gambling house, maybe with company that was not the one of your spouse or a husband.

Katy

What about - because there were a lot of, I guess, embassies in Venice as well, being such an important maritime Republic, so were people - were there some sort of ambassadors going maybe to and from different embassies?

Elisabetta

Absolutely Katy. You said it and I say yes, exactly. So we like to also give maybe propose something like a background of history of what could have been during the 16/17 hundreds, where when Venice was a city that was seen from foreign /other countries as a place full of people that love to enjoy life - entirely! So we were a city that was full of music, so full of enjoyments. The Venetians always found something that they would carry on throughout, probably evenings, to some meeting space. So what we call nowadays somehow salon literare, so areas which could have been placed. It is where they would meet they would discuss. But also, as we said, gambling and eating, drinking companies of people and definitely attracted a lot of foreigners coming to participate to this life - that was really a life of enjoyments of different activities. A lot of foreigners would arrive in Venice. They could have also their own gondolas, which funny enough, there is one to particular which for me, has always been quite interesting. So from a very early time of history, we've had magistracy, which was concerned

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with sanctuary. So this particular magistracy was concerned of trying to keep down all those, let's say, too much that the Venetians loved so much, like decoration, the gold, the paintings, those incredible dresses, costumes and jewelries and colors that really the government decided it was far too much.

Katy

Oh the Fun Police!?!

Elisabetta

Yeah, that's exactly, exactly. This is exactly what I was trying to mention. Now, if you think that it's easier. So the Fun Police was extremely active as a lot of work to do in Venice, Katy, And Interestingly enough, some of the rules and laws could not actually apply to some of our foreigners. So they were definitely enjoying themselves very much because they didn't necessarily have to comply with some of the laws that the Fun Police would try to impose.

Katy

I guess not much has changed in that regard really has it?

Elisabetta

Yes, absolutely. Well, I have to say I just had always this thing in mind about the people that lived/my Venetians in the past, they've always had somebody telling them what they should have done and how they should have behaved, et cetera, et cetera. And then, as we say here in Italy, it goes from one year and it goes out from the other year.

Katy

I love it. They just ignore it. I love it.

Elisabetta

Yes. Exactly.

Katy

No one should get in the way of fun, should they?

Elisabetta

Yes, exactly.

Katy

So when - back in those days were there lots and lots of gondolas, were there many hundreds of gondolas?

Elisabetta

Now I have to say I cry a little bit when I think about the past, because sometimes I do close my eyes and I think, okay, I want to be transported back. Maybe 500 years would be maybe the times I would love to go back. But yes, they were, let's say that probably in the golden years, the years, Katy, that where me and you probably would love to go back the 17/18 centuries. They estimated that they were probably in between 8 thousand and 10 thousand gondolas, yes. Can you imagine? If we think about right now, we think that we have just over 400 in service today. And as you know, most of them now, they carry tourists on canal rides. They are also used in some very special regattas - rowing race, which are held among some gondoliers. So nowadays also something else that I would like to mention, maybe for some of you guys that might be able to come and visit, we have gondolas, the gondolas nowadays, after the Pandemic, there is a new rule. They are not able to hold any more than five people at once. And instead, as you probably know, Katy, we also have gondolas that we call Traghetto. They are special gondolas. They hold, much more than five. They all think it's either ten or twelve. And they are situated in certain points of the Grand Canal, and we use them to cross literally the Grand Canal, and they make your life easier because sometimes, as you know, the Grand Canal has only three bridges that are crossed. Well, nowadays we've got also the fourth bridge, which is called the Ponte della Costituzione, the bridge of the Constitution. But we mainly call it as the Calatrava Bridge, because of the architect as planned.

Elisabetta

The other three bridges. And this is the very new bridge that connects the Piazzale Roma for the fast terminal to the train station area. Now, the old bridge, let's call the old bridges. They are only three. So you've got the train station bridge, the Rialto Bridge, which I think everyone probably might have seen a picture of. And then you have the bridge of the Academia, the Academia Bridge, which is further towards St Mark Square. Now, these three bridges, they are literally one is, let's say the beginning or the end of the Grand Canal, which is this inverted S canal that crosses the city. Then you have the central bridge, which is the Rialto Bridge, the one, let's say the one that has the shops on top, so that everyone has it clear. And that the Academia Bridge, which is on the other hand, it's either the beginning or the end of the Grand Canal, however, we see it. Now these Traghetti are somehow in between these three bridges. They used to be many more Traghetto. Nowadays, as I said, they cross literally the canal. The cost stays €2 for if you're a visitor in Venice and they avoid you in going up and down looking for a bridge. Sometimes when you are in a hurry, Katy, and I tell you, they are very, very useful. Now, the Venetians, they usually stand on this Traghetto while you can even see it if you wish. But sometimes if you are ten, it's quite difficult to find space for everyone and we prefer to just stand on the Traghetto. This is quite difficult

sometimes if you don't want to go on a 30 minutes gondola ride, you might end up on a Traghetto.

Katy

That's the budget travelers gondola ride.

Elisabetta

Exactly. Exactly.

Katy

But I have to tell you something, because is it €80 now for your 30 minutes ride?

Elisabetta

Yes.

Katy

Okay. So for five people, €80 for 30 minutes, some people think, oh, my goodness, that sounds so expensive. But you know what? Every time I go to Venice, I say, oh, I don't think I'll do a gondola ride this time. And then I do. Coz I love it so much. I love the gondolas. I just love everything about them.

Elisabetta

I totally understand you, Katy. I tell you, even for me - for us, Venetians, you think a lot of times I get either invited by clients and for me, I don't know sometimes they say, oh, no, I let you enjoy the ride. I have to say that the times that I end up in going and enjoying the ride with my clients sometimes you close your eyes and you think, yes. Now I know! You understand. It's quite an amazing feeling Katy you're sitting down, possibly as I totally love going around in the dark. And it's just amazing the feeling of going on a gondola and you have been I don't know. It's like as if somebody is hugging you and sort of have this wavy feeling that you might be floating on air. There is this little noise of the water and that's it. You are left in the dark on the water. It's a very, very interesting feeling.

Katy

Oh I just love it. It's hard to explain to people, isn't it? But you're right. It does feel like you're being hugged - like you're floating. And it's a very smooth ride. And I was wanting to ask you this. I really like going on the small side canals. I just think that it really brings out the mystery of Venice and it's all - you might not even see another gondola or you might see another just a glimpse out of your eye. But I actually prefer doing that to going on the Grand Canal, actually, because it's just kind of a little bit more special to me anyway.

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Elisabetta

Katy, I totally understand. You know, this is actually the exact advice that I tend to give to my clients, which is, you know, to ask you gondoliers to take you in some of the smaller canals and try to avoid the Grand Canal. Or maybe sometimes I don't know if you have it in mind that we have a fair, big statzio, which is the place where usually the gondoliers are stopped and they kind of form their little group of work. Right in front of the Piazza San Marco or Saint Mark Square. Now it is quite choppy to go on the ground right in front of Saint Marks Square. I definitely prefer the smaller canals because also, in particular, in these few days that we are suffering from this heat wave. It's nice to stay in the water, but definitely don't stay on a gondola under the sun because it's quite hard right now. I totally agree with you. And it's just a beautiful feeling. The silence of the gondolier.

Katy

I can just feel it now. I'm going to start gushing - I've got to stop. But if you're not going to catch the gondola from the outside, the front of Piazza San Marco, where can you get your gondola so that they can take you down the side canal? Because I think it is really special.

Elisabetta

Allora! Allora! So you can literally, Katy, next time if you come, your guests, the lovely friends that are listening. You literally just need to walk around the city. You will always find gondoliers that usually stops - very close to maybe some lovely canals. So you literally have to walk around and you will find somebody that will present maybe is he's on a little itinerary. And we will quickly illustrate to you where you'll be able to go in 30 minutes. The gondoliers also, they also have some very nice and funny personality, most of them, and they will be able to convince you to go on board of their gondolas. Extremely charming people. Most of them have great knowledge as well of the city. They will be able to inform you all the different palaces that you go by, or maybe tell you of different things, tell you about some personal information about their families and where they come from. A lot of gondoliers have been gondoliers through several generations. So it's interesting - there are people that have some deep knowledge. So it is an enriching experience as well. When you come in the city.

Katy

And, you know, if they have a uniform, the I think it's pretty famous throughout the world. They wear the black trousers and the striping shirt.

Elisabetta

Yes absolutely. So it's either they are stripy, black and white or red and white, black or blue. Sometimes I think they're either blue and white. But, you know, the funny thing, Katy, of their uniform, you know, that there is an actual shop. Let's call it the preferred shop because

they make the clothing for gondoliers with very good material. So that's very good wool for the winter. And they have this lovely shop right at the feet of the Rialto Bridge, let's say from the side of the Rialto market, and it's their formal shop, and you can go. And if you want, you can buy yourself a good uniform.

Katy

I didn't know that!!

Elisabetta

Yes, yes, yes.

Oh, I love it. I'm gonna get my husband one. I think he'll love it.

Elisabetta

I mean, I have to say it might be slightly, slightly more expensive, only because they use some very good textiles and wool and cotton. Otherwise, if you just like to get the normal t-shirts, stripey t-shirts, surely you'll find it a little bit cheaper, maybe at the foot of the Rialto bridge, just always on the side of the Rialto market.

Katy

An original Gondolier shirt. I think that's an amazing souvenir. I'm gonna put that on the list.

Elisabetta

Yes! I actually bought one myself. When I'm taking around families that have kids, I love to wear my stripy t-shirt as gondolier just to sort of fit in with the...

Katy

Oh, I love it. That's amazing. And so I think a lot of people think that all the Gondoliers are going to sing now how do you arrange that, because I think some of them do if they feel like it.

Elisabetta

I tell you, Katy, so maybe I'm not sure how we arrived at this point, but the gondoliers - once upon a time, maybe they used to sing a little bit more nowadays, they don't guarantee a song. They usually what they do, if you're really keen on some music on board of your gondola, they can actually arrange of a singer with usually a musician as well. That will go around with you and the gondola, of course, from the duration of the tour. Sometimes, Katy, to make it a little bit more, I say cost effective, you might want to have - maybe if you are a group of

maybe a ten people, you'll have a couple of gondolas and the gondoliers on board so that two or three gondolas will go down either the Grand Canal or a bigger canal with the musicians on board. I tell you, it's definitely a nice idea for a entertain. It's quite fun.

Katy

Oh, my goodness. I need to do that. That sounds amazing.

Elisabetta

Yes it is.

Katy

Okay, right. So back to the gondola because we talked about the banana shape, but at the back of the boat at the stern there, is this very special. It's like a decoration, isn't it? With the ...

Elisabetta

The fero. You know while talking about gondola, so we talked how the gondola has really gone through quite a lot of changes now just also, maybe a few things about gondola and how it's built and how this fero that you just mentioned does come and let's say come along. It's been - this is one of the various things that has been added through the centuries. Let's start in saying that one of the main changes that has been done through the gondolas has been done during the 1800s. And the name that we might want to keep in mind is one of the oh, I didn't talk to you about the squero either, Katy. The squero are the places where the ship yards where they actually make, and they also do the maintenance to the gondolas. One of the main changes that was done recently, when I say recently, Katy, we're talking about the end of 1800. It was done by a family that which name is Tramontin. Tramontin is a very important name when you talk about the gondola. The very first Tramontin that we need to remember is Domenico. Domenico starts is his squero in the end of 1800s. And then you have a sequence of various uncles, sons, and the last Tremontin male that we have is Roberto, which left us fairly recently. And it's probably one of the biggest loss that we've had for the gondola. Now, the main changes that the Tremontin did on the gondola has been number one - they made the gondola asymmetrical. So it means that if you look one side of the gondola, it's, let's say shorter than the other side of the gondola. And the asymmetrical shape is created specifically to allow the gondola to row with less effort and only by one man instead of having more than one person rowing the gondola. And also it's been made also to row only with a single hole on one side. So to be able to have a lesser effort but also to keep the gondola going straight. This is what they had to do. They've shortened one bit of the gondola, the other different thing that they've done for the gondola. It is the one of making a gondola so balanced that they literally have to work - they have to build the gondola, calculating and listen to this Katy, the weight of the gondolier.

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Katy

Oh.

Elisabetta

Yes! And also just to give you also some numbers which sometimes are quite interesting. So, in the construction of the gondola, we use eight different types of wood. And the part that are making up a gondola, they are 280 about. And before starting the actual construction of a gondola, it is necessary to choose the timber that they actually use. Now, the eight different kinds of woods they go from. And I'm going by memory, it's oak, pine and then some elm, some cherry wood, larch, walnut, some mahogany. And after choosing the timber, which he must not have any kind of defects, because that's extremely important that the wood that they use is perfect. And then that's when we start to proceed with the - I don't know if you can say the seasoning of the wood, so it needs to be kept drying out for nearly about a year.

Katy

Wow.

Elisabetta

Yes. So I should also mention that the actual construction of a gondola, it can take several months, and it involves about, let's say, 500 hours of work. So we're not kidding here. It's a big operation, really, to build a gondola. Now, also, you know, every kind of wood that we use, as just mentioned, we realize a different structure of the boat. And it's very important also in particular, let's say, to use a very resistant wood to build the hips of the gondola which, for example, is built with ????. Or oak, also because it's quite easily bendable. And then. Okay. So we were talking about the iron pieces that we have on the gondola. Now in the construction of the gondola, the iron is used to realize the iron of the boat and then the stern iron. Now, these are the only two iron parts of the gondolas, which are, let's say in English, I think you say indispensable. They need to be in metal, and they contribute as well for the balance, the weight of the gondolier. And as well, in the past, they also said that it was a question of - as you know, when we have a very high tides, sometimes the gondolier has to struggle quite a bit to be able to get a gondola through a bridge. So if the iron parts of the stern and the boat would be able to go through the gondola, that was the proof that the whole boat would be able to go down. Another thing that I don't want to forget either is the forcola now, the forcola is I wonder if I can call it the crutch of the oar. So it's the actual piece where we can lay the oar when oar.

Katy

So it's where they stay rested so they can move it around.

Elisabetta

Exactly.

Katy

Yeah.

Elisabetta

Now, you know, that's a very important part of the gondola for the gondolier, and it's actually made by somebody different. It's not made within the squero that we know. It's made by a specialist because this particular piece, it's crucial for the gondolier when he has to manoeuvre the gondola. So he can use it to do a variety of different movements, manoeuvres to the gondola. So it's got to be perfect. The forcola is made in walnut, ??? or usually beech wood. Not to forget at the end of the whole construction, Katy, we do need to also paint the gondola. The gondola until is not sold won't have any external paint to prove that is not being used. And it will be painted when it's bought. And its consisting of seven layers of paint. Black, of course, paint. At the moment, I have to say there's something that is we call in Venetian - we call the last is that parecio. And this is a good Venetian word. And it consists of two seater sofa. And also you have a couple of stools, usually the completes the inside of the gondola for the passenger.

Elisabetta

So as you probably remember, you also have some areas of the gondola that have decorated, usually the decoration, its inlaid wood to some surfaces of the gondola, and that's usually chosen mainly from the gondolier, how to decorate the gondola. This part here of the decorations could actually mean quite a lot for the price of the gondola, because the inlaid wood is made by an artist and that really can change the price.

Katy

It sounds like it must cost thousands and thousands of euros just to make one gondola.

Elisabetta

Allora Katy! The price, as I say, it varies quite a bit. It goes from approximately 30 to 50,000. Of course, this variates a lot from the decorations that we have on a gondola. But, Katy, at the end, we have to think sometimes - the first time that I heard the price I thought Mama Mia! that's quite something. But then you start to think 500 hours of work of at least two people. Now you were talking about something that only of work. It's about well four months and then another month for painting.

Elisabetta

How long is this gondola? Can definitely explain the amount, I really think

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Katy

I absolutely agree. And, you know, one of my favorite things to do in Venice, actually go to the squero in Dorsoduro, which I know is very close to where you live. And you can actually there's a lovely little that osteria that overlooks the squero. And you can actually, if you're very lucky, you can see them working on the gondolas.

Elisabetta

Is that so?

Katy

I love it? Yes.

Elisabetta

Yes Katy, actually, I have to tell you sometimes that squero, which is the square of San Trovaso, which actually takes the name from the Church that is right next to it. Now, the square of San Trovaso is one of the most special. They are very specialized. They don't like to be disturbed by us tourists, but you can arrange little visits of the squero. And it's the same place that you probably remember. It's got quite an interesting look because it looks like somehow a mountain hut and in effect, the very first workers they were coming from either the Cadore which is an area in the mountains, or ,Valsugana which is the mountains that are quite close to us. And it has been there from just very recent, Katy, probably the 1600s.

Katy

Oh, my goodness. Yeah. It's just a special place. I really love watching that. It was - I could have stayed there for hours, to be honest. I find it really fascinating - just the amount of thought and attention to detail that goes into making this beautiful boats. And it's no wonder that's become iconic because so much work does go into it. It's amazing. I love it so much.

Elisabetta

I do.

Katy

Okay. Now what about the going back to these gondoliers - they must be very skilful. Do they have to do a lot of training there?

Elisabetta

It depends very much if they are of the family, they would have probably been taught from an early age by whoever in the family was gondolier. Yes, of course. They have a 8 training that

they have to go through. They have, of course, a test. You need to have a license. They also need to have a good knowledge of various areas of Venice and as well. Katy, as we all know, they need to be of a certain physical, not shape, but they need to be quite strong because to be able to row several hours during the day. I'm thinking even right now with the heat or maybe with the freezing cold of the winter, it's not that easy.

Katy

Yeah, they're pretty amazing. Just what goes into making the experience that you have on your 30 minute gondola ride. I think that's the beauty of it is so much goes into it. The training, the building of the boat and the decoration, all of it just makes this experience so magical, I think.

Elisabetta

Absolutely. And Katy, just to finish up I want to tell you about a couple of different things. First, you know, that for us Venetians, at least in the past, and nowadays it's very fashionable, when you get married, the gondola will be - used to be at least the boat - that will take you to the Church together with your witnesses. And, of course, something else. The gondola was, actually, how do you say decorated for a wedding. So the gondoliers had a totally different uniform. They were dressed mainly in white and they were dressed for a ceremony. So it's not a usual gondolier uniform. And nowadays we tend to use a lot the taxis, just the normal taxis with motors, but back in time, even I remember several weddings in my family, not the most recent ones, we reached the Church in gondola, yeah, it's quite fascinating. It was just part of the ceremony, really part of the ceremony of the weddings. And Katy I have to tell you as well, for certain funerals in your last journey to to San Michele, the island of the cemetery, you will be carried with special gondolas to the cemetery island.

Katy

Oh, that's amazing. I mean, I could talk about gondolas for hours and hours. I really could. I mean, we haven't even touched on the regattas and all of those amazing events where you can see them racing the gondolas.

Elisabetta

Exactly.

Katy

You've got one coming up, I think, in a few weeks, which.

Elisabetta

Soon - I have to tell you, Katy, I have not looked yet if it's going to happen or not, because I don't want to upset myself with possible cancellation.

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Katy

Well, let's cross our fingers and hope that it does. Elisabetta, it's been so fascinating hearing about gondolas from you. And I know that our listeners would love to connect with you, that they can learn more about Venice and perhaps join you on a tour. How can they do that?

Elisabetta

I do have a website, and it's venicewithbetty.com.

Katy

Ha - I love it!!!

Elisabetta

Yeah [venicewithbetty](http://venicewithbetty.com) is my website, and they can write any time they like. And I will be very happy to answer to any questions.

Katy

Oh, absolutely wonderful. Okay, so what we're gonna do is we will put all of Elisabetta's details onto our website, of course. So if you would like to discover Venice with her, then you can okay. Grazie Mille! Thank you, Elisabetta. It's been way too long between trips to Venice for me and I'm pining for your city and yet another ride on a gondola. So thank you so much for joining us on Untold Italy Today.

Elisabetta

Fantastico! Thank you very much, Katy. I hope I'll see you soon. Maybe we go for a gondola ride together.

Katy

Oh I hope so. I really hope so. Grazie

Elisabetta

Prego

Katy

Ciao

Katy

I've ridden on gondolas so many times and it never gets old. I think I'll stop telling myself that I won't enjoy one on my next trip because I know I absolutely will. One time we actually saw a gondola wedding procession and it was so beautiful. I think I'll remember that for the rest of my life.

Just last week in our Untold Italy Insiders group, Elisabetta did us a live tour of the Rialto Market area and bridge. While she was talking about the area gondolas kept popping into view behind her on the Grand Canal. It was just magical to see. We were all so thrilled. The timing was absolutely perfect.

If you start to get a little bit obsessed by gondolas like me then I can highly recommend a visit to Ca'Rezzonico which is a wonderful palazzo overlooking the Grand Canal. They have a really beautiful collection of 18th art and furniture and in the entrance foyer there is a stunning vintage gondola so you can see what they looked like 200 years ago.

And at the Libreria Acqua Alta bookshop in San Marco, a gondola piled high with books is the lounging spot for a few local cats. It's incredibly charming, as you might expect. This is a wonderful place to visit in Venice to admire this repurposed gondola - actually I'm not sure how they make any money because no one seems to buy anything, but it is a beautiful spot and so unique to Venice.

I've put the details of the bookshop, Ca'Rezzonico and all the places Elisabetta mentioned into the show notes at untolditaly.com/87. Elisabetta's details are in there too should you wish to to join her on a tour when you finally make it to Venice. Or if you'd like to see her live tours direct from Venice into your home, why not join Untold Italy Insiders. We'd love to have you join us and share in all the fun of getting to Italy and Italians like Elisabetta so much better. This month we've also learned how to make gnocchi with pesto from our favorite cooking school in Capri which was absolutely delicious.

That's all for this week on Untold Italy, I hope you enjoyed learning about gondolas as much as I did. We've got a wonderful episode coming up next week about a unique way to take your very own "grand tour" of Italy. But until then it's "ciao for now"