

Untold Italy Episode 95 - Coffee Culture

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 95.

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,

How are you all doing? I have to tell you that I'm excited to be talking about an important part of Italian culture today that goes well beyond simply drinking a cup of this most famous beverage. And I am, of course, referring to coffee or cafe as they say in Italian.

Before we get started though I wanted you to have a listen to this audio clip..

Ahhh, that is the sound of a barista making coffee with an espresso machine and it's one of my favorite sounds in the world. With every hiss, clunk and grind of the machine, you know that there is a waft of aromatic Italian style coffee to follow.

Coffee is a very serious business in Italy and it is an integral part of daily life there whether it is taken at home or in a cafe bar. And it's fair to say that the rituals and customs around drinking coffee are almost as important as the flavor.

Today, with the help of my special guest Michael Horne from Du Coffee, we're going to take you through the history and quirks of Italian coffee, how to order one and some of the best coffee bars to visit when you're in Italy.

Michael is a dedicated coffee drinker and Italophile from California who has traveled to Italy every year since he first visited in 1995. So I am thrilled to have him join us on the show to uncover the mysteries of Italian coffee culture for you.

Katy

Benvenuto, Michael. Ciao and welcome on to the Untold Italy Podcast.

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Michael

Thank you for having me, Katy. it's a real pleasure to be here. I'm really excited to chat about things. Coffee in particular.

Katy

Oh, absolutely. I love Italian coffee, and it's a particularly favorite topic of mine because I just am obsessed with Italian coffee. It's just the culture of it, the rituals about drinking the coffee. And it's so important in Italy, not just the actual drink, but before we get started on all of that, I'm curious. How did you discover Italy and Italian coffee? What's your special Italian story?

Michael

Wow. Italy. Yes, I've been there many times over a very long period of time. I really kind of fell in love with Italy. My first trip was back in 1995. Might be dating myself a little bit here, but what really impressed me when I was there is just how close the Italians are. Family is a huge thing in Italy and kind of the openness, the connection. It's a very important part of their culture, and I really bonded to that. That was really exciting to me. I've been fortunate. I've traveled to Italy every year since then, kind of exploring the Peninsula. In 2003, I started a wine importing business. I started importing wine directly from Italy. A buddy of mine lived in Cortona in Tuscany, and he introduced me to some wonderful winemakers who had won awards for their wines in Italy but didn't have anybody to import their wines into the States. So I started a business called Dall'Uva, which was focused on importing Italian wines exclusively Italian wines. I'm a huge fan of those as well. And so over the years I've traveled many times, often, like two or three times a year. So I feel quite blessed to have been able to do that. And one thing that really surprised me when I was there was kind of the central role of coffee and really connecting Italians. And I became quite fascinated with Italian coffee culture. And now I'm spending my time sharing that coffee culture and the taste of Italian coffee with fanatics of coffee here in the States, mostly.

Katy

Sounds exciting. And it's interesting because coffee is actually a fairly recent addition to Italian culture. I mean, in the context of the 2 to 3000 year old history, how much do you know about the history of coffee in Italy? Can you tell us a little bit about it?

Michael

Quite a bit has happened, really, in the last little more than 100 years, as you're saying, it really has taken root and it's just become an integral part of the culture there. So you really kind of got to look back, though. If you want to talk about history, you got to look back to Ethiopia where coffee was cultivated. I think it was back in the 14 hundreds or so. Even prior

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to that, they don't really know when coffee was discovered as a magic bush, if you will, in Ethiopia.

Michael

But I think it goes back to something like the 800s, like 9th century, and then eventually they started cultivating it. And the folks in the Ottoman Empire picked it up and started really moving coffee throughout the known world at that time. And so in Istanbul, what's known now is Istanbul. And throughout the Muslim world at the time, coffee houses became a place to sit and really commune with friends, maybe do business, plot things, all these other wonderful things. And coffee was kind of the energizing drink that was at the center of that. And my understanding is that the first coffee houses started to show up in what is now Italy, showed up in Venice in the early 16 hundreds, I think, 1610, 1615, something like that. And it was really quite interesting. The records show that the local Church officials at the time condemned it at the time, as it was considered the bitter invention of Satan. And it was probably because of the linkage to the Muslim world at the time. But eventually the Pope, I think, was Clement the 8th, I think, was the Pope that he wanted to decide on this and whether this was an evil drink or not. And so he tasted it for himself, found out he liked it and essentially blessed it for its use throughout Europe. And so these coffee houses just kind of spread throughout Italy and became just kind of a fabric of the society. And it's really the modern coffee bars, coffee houses and the espresso machine really kicked-in in like early 19 hundreds. The first espresso machines were invented came online, I think, 1905, something like that. And they started spreading as a way to have a quicker coffee - an express coffee, if you will, as the traditional way of making coffee prior to that was to actually boil it like the Turks do - they still do today with what they call a Cezve. So its roots are really in the Muslim world in Ethiopia, but it's really taken on its own life over the last hundred years or so.

Katy

Yeah, it really has. And I think if you look at Venice and there's some absolutely stunning cafes, historic cafes where they would have made the coffee back then, the cafe Florian, for example, is really beautiful. And you have those tradition of those grand coffee houses. But I think there's something really special about the local coffee bars in Italy, there's something really different and it really brings the communities together. So I can imagine over this past year, it must have been quite difficult. But have you experienced those local coffee bars?

Michael

Well, I think it became kind of the way to wake up in the morning when you fly over from - I'm on the West Coast of the US and you fly over and mornings are rough on the first few days, we would stumble down to one of the local coffee bars. Now, the concept of a bar, there is a little bit different than it is here in the States. When you think of, like, a lot of places, a bar implies that there's really the focal point is like alcoholic beverages. And in the case of Italy, the coffee bar is very much a place for coffee, a place for maybe some morning snacks, a few other things. You can still get some wine, you can have a little aperitif in the afternoon. But

yeah, you start in the morning and I know the Italians typically do two or three visits to the local coffee bar in their town, of which there are many. And for me, it just became an integral part of starting my day. And over time, I came to realize that the local bar in a town or a city was often kind of the focal point for Italians to congregate and get together and chat and catch up on the latest gossip and talk about the latest sports and who's winning in football and all that good stuff. And it was just adorable. It's wonderful. And I love spending time in the coffee bars in Italy to this day.

Katy

Yeah, it's really fascinating, isn't it? Even if you go just a couple of times on your stay, if you're staying somewhere for a week and you go there one or two days in a row, they get to know you and they get to know what coffee you like. And for us, it was really special because they get to know our kids. And suddenly all these lollipops would appear and it would be coffee and lollipops.

Michael

Yeah. I think the baristas have amazing memory or something. There's a coffee bar in Vernazza along the Cinque Terre, and I drop in from time to time, and it's called Blue Marlin Bar and there's a barista there that - they may only see me one day out of the year every couple of years, and I'll show up and they'll be like, oh, Ciao, come stai? It's amazing the memory of these folks. It really is a very friendly and communal kind of place.

Katy

I really love that about it, too. And so what about when you go, what sort of coffee do you have when you go to the coffee bar in Italy? Are you a strictly espresso kind of guy?

Michael

Yeah. I'm a fan of espresso here at home, I often do, like a pour over. So it is definitely a cafe Americano style here. But I do love espresso typically in the afternoon. But when I'm over there, I almost always start with a cappuccino in the morning. I might grab one of those brioche cornetti, as they call cornetto. Looks like, as you know, it looks a little bit like a croissant, but not exactly. And usually some sort of marmalade in the middle of it. But I'll start with that and then a little bit later in the day, I'll have just typically espresso. And then there's something called Espresso Macchiato, which I'm sure, you know, is really just espresso with a little bit of foam. It's marked with a little bit of milk foam. And I use espresso throughout the day. I'll probably do four or five espresso every day while I'm in Italy. I know it's crazy, but it gives me the energy to keep going.

Katy

You do need that because you tend to do a lot more walking in Italy than you do when you're at home, which is great. And you need that little extra boost. But it's also fun just to nip into the bars and just see what's going on, because you can see those definite, unique local cultures happening there. And there's always a few older guys propping up the bar and pouring over the newspaper and gesticulating with their hands. And they're obviously getting quite passionate about something. And it's just a really great place to people watch, isn't it?

Michael

Yeah, it is. Maybe you know what this is, Katy? I'm not sure what it is, but oftentimes I'll see people playing some form of a card game. I don't know what it is. I don't think it's like Pinochle. It's something I think uniquely Italian in some of these bars, but it's usually a lot of locals, typically men who sit around in the afternoon either nursing coffee, or maybe they have an aperitif or something.

Katy

Yeah. I don't actually know what that card game is, but if you go find the cards there, you can actually get some beautiful versions of them. It's a really nice souvenir just as an aside. But, yeah, they do tend to have these. They sit down and they settle in for a while, don't they?

Michael

Oh, they'll be there for a while. They get quite animated, too, slamming the cards down. It's pretty exciting, except I'm completely clueless on what it is they're playing. I'd love to jump in -that would be fun.

Katy

Yeah. It'd be fun to learn. So just going back to the types of coffee, I think if we're visiting Italy, it can be a little bit overwhelming because there's so many different types of coffee, and so maybe let's step through one by one because as you mentioned, there's the espresso and that's sort of like the standard. And it's made with this beautiful machine. And those machines are actually a work of art in themselves. So the first step is the espresso, which is just a shot of coffee, right?

Michael

just a shot. They do tend to measure how much it is and the amount of water and the right pressure. At a good coffee bar. They take this very seriously, and they're trying to make you an amazing espresso, but it's not a lot, right? It's maybe three quarters of an inch, 2cm at most in the cup. So it's fairly low, but you can order if you really want a bit more, you can do an espresso doppio right? A double? Yes.

Katy

Double. I'm a kind of a double type of person, especially when I first get there. But I think people might be thinking if they're coming from a culture where more is more - that they're like "hang on a minute, why are we only having this tiny little coffee, which costs, say, maybe around €2 to €3? Why are we paying for this?" But it's all about the flavor, isn't it? It's all about maximum flavor that they can extract from the beans. And I think that's a really important part of the culture there, too. It's not about how much it is, but it's about the experience.

Michael

Absolutely. I think what they're trying to do is in addition to making it a really nice environment for people to come together, there is a focus on the flavor of the coffee, and many of the coffee bars, traditional coffee bars get their coffee from some larger roasters, in Italy. I think most people are familiar with Illy Lavazza - there are some others as well. And the quality of those coffees, I think, are pretty good. But there's some even newer local roasters who are making even more impressive coffee roasts. But the quality of the espresso is really important. So typically when you get your espresso, you will often get a glass, just a short glass of, like, a fizzy sparkling water. And the idea is you can use that to cleanse your palate before you actually enjoy your espresso, so you can enjoy it more clearly. So yeah, it is about the flavor. And I think typically here in the States, and just like I do here at home, where I do a pour over, I do like the flavor of coffee in a tall cup, and you can still get that - typically, they call that Cafe Americano. So American style coffee. And that's just really a shot of espresso. Or you can ask for a doppio, and they'll either give you a cup, a bigger cup in a little tiny pitcher of really hot water, or they will simply give you a cup with the water in the espresso, so you can kind of enjoy that. It's not what the Italians drink, but it is definitely something you can always get, and you can add milk to it. You can add sugar to it - those kinds of things.

Katy

I think people do think, wow, I like my coffee this way, so maybe it's a good way to sort of ease your way into that different style of coffee because do you think the flavor is different to the flavor that you have in the States? I know here in Australia, where we are, we love our coffee, but I've traveled quite extensively in the States too, so I know there's a different culture around coffee in the States that it might be if someone is new to Italy, it might be a good idea to go for the Americano, so they can experience that as their first try.

Michael

Yeah. I think it's definitely a good way to start and then they can experiment, have an espresso, or they can also do what's called an espresso lungo, so a long espresso, which means a little bit more water. They actually pull the espresso for a bit longer. So it's a little taller, but it's still in those tiny cups. So it's not necessarily what we would be typically used to. And the other thing is like I said, I usually start with a cappuccino there, and the cappuccino there

is amazing. I don't know if it's the milk or what it is, but the cappuccino is wonderful. And I try to find places here in the States that can make it like that. It's just not done that way. There's something unique about it. But the cappuccino is an option. We talked about the espresso macchiato, which is like espresso with a little bit of milk foam. And then there's also for those who might typically order something we would think of as a Mocha here in the States, like at a Starbucks or something- they have a Caffe Marocchino. So it's not quite the same thing, but it is coffee with milk and some chocolate. So that's another option for folks who want to have something maybe a little bit more familiar. And then their idea of iced coffee, they have something called Caffe Shakerato. Are you familiar with that?

Katy

Oh, my gosh. I dream of Shakerato.

Michael

Exactly when it's so hot out in the afternoon. You want some coffee. But this idea of drinking hot espresso in the afternoon, and a lot of these bars may not have a lot of air conditioning. Yeah - the Shakerato is the way to go. So that's Shakerato, meaning simply shaken. It's a blended or a shaken coffee, and they usually sweeten it up. It's amazing. Delicious. And it's a great way for people to get started. Yeah.

Katy

And it's really refreshing, too. It's got that energy boost and they're refreshing. And you're ready to go back out there? See the Italian sites.

Michael

Yeah.

Katy

Just on the sugar, though. It's really interesting. I know down south they add a lot of sugar to their coffee. Personally, I have weaned myself off sugar, and I actually just like the taste of coffee itself, but they do add a lot of sugar in their coffee, and it won't be unusual to see people doing three teaspoons or more, which I find quite interesting.

Michael

Yeah, it is amazing. I usually add sugar when I'm there - here I don't put sugar in my coffee. I just drink it freshly brewed. No milk. I don't add anything to it. But over there I add the sugar, and part of it is the espresso, I'll say the traditional espresso has a little bit of a bitterness to it, and so for me, I add a little bit of sugar to it. The first time (it reminds me) the first time I had an espresso in Italy was in Milan, and I was at trying to remember the name of the place - it will come to me, it's on my list of some of the favorite places - I had an espresso, and I

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didn't understand that most people had sugar. So the barista kind of pushes an espresso to me, and I start drinking it. And he's looking at me while he's, like, polishing a glass. He ends up - he spoke English, and he goes, "Your life must be sweet to take your coffee so bitter". And I thought that was 1 - it was hilarious and 2, he says most people put sugar in, why don't you try that? And so I put some sugar and I'm like, okay, I get it. I get it. This works actually really well. Yeah, they do put a lot of sugar in that. Even the cappuccino. I leave the cappuccino alone, and I don't add any sugar because the milk has a sweetness to it. But yeah, the espresso I always usually add one little packet of, like, raw sugar.

Katy

Yes, it does need a little bit of extra, and it's just a tasting, but it blows my mind when they put, like, three or more in. That doesn't work for me. So what about ordering the coffee when you get to the bar? Because I think that also gets people a little bit nervous. But it's also just such a lovely part of the culture. And it's something that once you understand it, it's very nice to be part of that culture and order your coffee in the Italian way.

Michael

Absolutely. Well, the beauty is there's coffee everywhere. So anywhere you're going to visit, even some obscure little town in the middle of nowhere, I guarantee there will be a coffee bar there. And how you order coffee is pretty much the same everywhere. You just enter the bar, typically the way I do it as I head to the cashier and there might be a small line. But usually there isn't one. You just kind of jump in line. And then when you get to the cashier, you just say "Vorrei un caffè, per favore", so Vorrei means 'I would like' it doesn't mean 'I want it'. 'I would like a coffee, please'. So "Vorrei un caffè, per favore" or if you want a cappuccino, you would say ""Vorrei un cappuccino". It is very little effort to kind of memorize that. And in fact, the Italians really appreciate it when you try the Italian a little bit. So what happens is you typically pay in advance. And as you said, the price can be a few euros, depends on where you're at. In some places, it's fairly inexpensive, can even be €1.50, something like that. You pay in advance. They hand you a little receipt. It's called a scontrino, and it's just a little piece of white paper that shows what you ordered. And then you take that to the bar. And the whole reason you pay in advance is the barista does not want to handle money. They view it as that would dirty their hands. They're busy making a very special drink, so they don't want to handle money. And so all they do is they look at your receipt, you put it on the bar and push it towards them and they'll take a look at your receipt. It'll say what you ordered. They'll prepare the drink for you and they'll give it to you, and they'll either provide you that glass of water either before or you can ask for it if you don't get one, and then you either put some sugar into it whatever you would like and enjoy it right there at the bar, typically standing there are some places where you can go sit in, like if you're on a piazza in Florence or Rome or outside, you can sit down at a table and somebody will come and take your coffee order for you, and you don't have to pay in advance, you pay at the end. But in that case, you actually pay a bit more because there's service involved.

Katy

Yeah, the most expensive coffee I've ever had is in Venice. I think most people have had that experience, but what you're paying for is not just the coffee, but it's the whole experience of being in this beautiful Piazza. And in Venice, they often have music, and it's stunning. You're not getting ripped off or fleeced. This is really if you get extra service, you pay a little bit more when you're sitting outside. So it's good to know that, I think, but I like that standing at the bar as well. It's kind of like this is definitely a stance, especially those older guys that kind of lean up on the bar and sort of down their coffees. And I think as well there's a difference in the city bars, cafe bars and in the ones in the smaller towns, because what I like in Rome, for example, is if you go to one and everyone's dressed up for work and they've immaculately turned out in Milan as well, and they look amazing and they are having their coffees, but it's a little bit more casual, obviously, out in the country. I just love those little differences.

Michael

Yeah. I think the first time I was in Milan at an espresso bar, as you say, the locals, because of Milan's history and banking and fashion, you'll have people come in who are immaculately dressed. It's just amazing. And they'll order a coffee. They might say one or two things, the espresso shows up, they literally toss it back and they're gone. It really is like a real quick thing. You see, some people literally toss it back in just seconds. I like to sip and enjoy and take my time.

Katy

Yeah, for sure. And I think that's the beauty of the piazza and that experience, too. But I really encourage people to go into the bar because you will see the process of it being made. And it's not just turning a cup under a machine and turning a button on. It's actually really a beautiful process and a very considered process to make the coffee and I think it's very beautiful, just from the whole squashing the coffee into the I don't even know what that thing is called the coffee receptacle that goes into the machine and it's just a beautiful thing.

Michael

Yeah, it is. And most of the machines you'll ever see are just these amazing, beautiful - chrome. They're almost their own works of art. They keep the cups hot on top of the espresso machine. And being a barista is a real profession there. You can actually make a decent living as a barista in a cafe/a coffee bar in Italy. And it's because they take this very seriously, and they want you to really enjoy the coffee. And it's great when they also have some pastries and other things that you can have with it - also makes it really wonderful.

Katy

And everything about it shows that they take pride even from what they're wearing, because a lot of places they'll be wearing, like a white shirt and an apron and they'll be looking very smart. And it's because they take it so seriously. And I appreciate that.

Michael

Yeah, absolutely. And most of them are actually quite kind. If it's a very busy bar and they're literally running around pulling lots of shots, it's hard to get their attention. But if it's a slower pace, many of them would be happy to even have a conversation or chat some things up. You can ask questions, these kinds of things. I'd say the majority of them will speak some amount of English. That's always been my experience. I like to use Italian while I'm there. I feel like it gives me a little extra edge. They're like, "oh, this guy, he's American, but he speaks Italian - let's make sure his coffee is amazing". It's a lot of fun to strike up a conversation with them if you can.

Katy

Yeah, of course. And all you need to do is when you walk in, you said "Bonjourno", and they really appreciate it. Really. And that's the thing in Italy, as well as if you're entering any type of bar or restaurant or shop say "Bonjourno", because that's part of their culture is they wouldn't sort of rush into a shop and then rush out again. That's definitely - the greeting process is very important, too.

Michael

Yes - that's really what one of the things that attracted me is that everybody will greet you with at least a "Bonjourno", or if they feel comfortable a "Ciao" or "Salve" or something like that throughout the culture, it isn't just eating the coffee bar. It's quite refreshing.

Katy

Yeah. It's civilized I think. It's that we're not actually going in for what we want, we're actually acknowledging you as a human being and that you're here to share part of your day with them. And I really appreciate that, too. So, Michael, do you have some favorite coffee bars in Italy? Because I know I have a few, but do you have a few favorites that you always go back to.

Michael

Yeah - the towns I often visit, I end up building up some favorites that I always visit or go to. They're very comfortable. So it's really fun. But in terms of some places I really like around Milan. And as you and I talked about before, Milan is the espresso world, if you will. In Milan is really kind of where the center of gravity is in my mind. For coffee in Italy, you go to Milan now you're going to see really two types of coffee bars. There's some classic coffee bars, the

traditional ones we just talked a lot about and then there's some new kind of exciting, real vibrant. They call them a third wave coffee shops or today they often call it specialty coffee. But there's a real community in Milan, and it's growing throughout Italy is very exciting, but they're basically roasting their own beans with more precision and really focusing on the coffee, even to a higher degree than traditional espresso. Orsonero is one of my favorites. It's a new kind of specialty coffee type place. They still pull espresso. Wonderful, wonderful espresso. But they're very particular about the beans and the temperature and how they do it.

Michael

It's in the Lazaretto, which is, I think, kind of North East of the center of Milan. It's wonderful. And they've also added filtered coffee and French press for tourists in particular and students as well. So it's pretty fun. The classic ones, like in Milan. There's one called Pasticceria Cucchi. It's been around since, like, 1936. It was the first place I ever had espresso in Milan. Just wonderful. It's like you're walking back in time into this place and they're pressing wonderful espresso. And they have just a case full of pastries and all kinds of sweets. It's really quite wonderful. There's another one I like in Milan called Upcycle. It's in kind of the outskirts of town, but I happen to run across it - if you can think of it this way. It's a coffee house for people who like to ride bikes. And when I first ran into it, I'm like, this seems really odd. And out front of it, there's like this bike racks with tons and tons of bicycles. There's a lot of students, but it's kind of North Eastern Centro Historico, and it's just really young, hip vibe.

Michael

They have these broad, long tables where people sit. There isn't really a bar to take your coffee. You actually sit down, order, and they have some really nice food and breakfast and lunch items. Really nice. Let's talk about Florence a little bit. I don't know if you have a special place there.

Katy

I can't resist Cafe Gilli. It's another one of those historic, but I'm a bit of a sucker for the historic places myself. I don't know about you. What's your favorite place in Florence?

Michael

Well, there's a place called Ditta Artigianale, which translates to artisanal business. There's a guy named Franco Sanapo and Franco - he was one of the folks probably, I don't know, 10/15 years ago, kind of decided that Italian coffee could be taken up a level. So you have these large roasters, like Illy and Lavazza and these other folks. And he thought, you know what the Italian coffee blend for espresso could be roasted better, we could source better beans. And he's really helped get kind of the specialty coffee market launched in Italy.

Michael

So he's got a nice little place. I told you about the place in Milan, where the first time I had espresso, I didn't put sugar in it. And the guy, he wasn't really a scolding, it was more of a fun joke. And when I met Franco at the Ditta Artigianale he brought out some special beans that he had roasted like a few days prior because he usually let them stand for a few days. Anyway, he brought them out. He ground them himself. He pressed me an espresso, and he put it on the table. And he's basically an artisan. Right. So I take the espresso and I dump sugar in it. He looks at me like, "what are you doing to my espresso? It doesn't need sugar. It's not bitter." I'm like, really. Okay. So that's where I learned that there's probably no right way, but it depends on what shop you're at. I guess that's true.

Katy

We're always learning, aren't we?

Michael

Exactly? That was a learning experience. In Rome, there's two places I like to go. There are definitely classics. There's one called Caffè Sant Eustachio, and there's another one called Taza D'Oro. And both of them are just around the corner from the Pantheon. I don't think they're too far from the Piazza Navona, but they've been around forever. Sant Eustachio - they use wood fire to roast their beans. And the secret is they don't actually roast them there. They roast them up in Friuli but they use wood fire to roast their beans and their whole claim is that the espresso tastes better because the water comes from an ancient aqueduct, right? I don't know how you validate that, but it sounds good. It's a great story.

Katy

It is. It's a beautiful place, isn't it? Because they've got a beautiful mosaic of a deer outside the front, so you can't miss it, really. And there's usually a long line of people waiting to get their coffee out the front there.

Michael

Yeah. In Rome, if you're near the Vatican, another place I like it's called Caffè Pergamino. So it's kind of like a hybrid between some of these new specialty places and classic. And they also make their own tortas and different baked goods, these kinds of things. It's really wonderful. Those are some of my favorites. Everywhere I go, I tend to gravitate towards the place where most people are showing up and there's, like, community and people are coming and going. It's really nice. Yeah.

Katy

And it's something about the coffee does taste really amazing. I mentioned to you when we had a chat earlier that we would drive from London, which doesn't have great coffee, sorry. I

mean, you can't find it. But it doesn't have the best. And then we drove through France, which has terrible coffee. And as soon as we get over the border, we would rush to the first auto grill, which is kind of like the roadway roadhouses, isn't it? And just go give us a coffee because they actually make really good coffee. And we would have our coffee. And then we would know we would definitely in Italy.

Michael

Yeah. It is a relief to have a coffee in Italy when you land or when you drive in or whatever. Did you hear there's Starbucks now in Italy?

Katy

In Milan, yes!

Michael

yeah. I think the Italians are not happy, but it's interesting. So I was in Milan not too long ago, just briefly, and I saw that they have a reserve roastery one not too far from the Duomo. And there was a line out the door. And strangely, they had guards at the door - I'm not sure why that is, but there was a line out the door. And the prices of it are about double what the Italians would typically pay double or triple. And so the Italians, I don't think they're very impressed, right? But it's because they don't do 20 ounce cafe latte or these kinds of things, and they definitely don't take it to go, right? Whereas at Starbucks, you can do that. So I think most of the folks going there are probably tourists and probably students, so they can take some coffee to class or whatever. And it's fine, right. Starbucks has really perfected the taste of their particular style of coffee pretty much all over the world. It's a bit of a safety blanket, really for travelers. When I was traveling quite a bit in Asia many years ago, tea was the main thing, but coffee was just starting to show up. And there were Starbucks, and I went to them because I could get a predictable nice cappuccino or a cup of coffee. And so they have a place. But I think in Italy, there are so many coffee bars that I'm not sure Starbucks is really needed, but they felt it was worthwhile to set up shop there. So they have, I think, eight of them now. I think I read recently - they have eight Starbucks in Milan. There's one in Torino, and supposedly there's one in the outskirts of Florence. Other than that, I don't think there's much else.

Katy

Well, it'll be interesting to see how they go where I'm from here in Melbourne, they didn't survive because we're a big coffee culture here. They weren't welcome in Melbourne. Oh, my goodness. Now how about some of the coffee rules? A lot of people think that there's some rules around you can't order a cappuccino after 11:00 in the morning. What do you think about that?

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Michael

Well, I remember when I first went over and had a cappuccino in, like, in the afternoon, they kind of look at you oddly. Right. So I'm being nice. The Italians don't really do cappuccino or really hot milk drinks or even cold milk drinks after was it 10:30/11:00. And part of it is you're coming up on lunch, right? And really having a big, heavy cafe latte at noon just before you go in and have a nice Italian meal doesn't really make a lot of sense to them. And in fact, really very few of them will do espresso much between eleven and lunchtime because they believe that the espresso will close your stomach a bit and not prepare you well for the meal. So they just don't do it. And so when you order it, they will provide it to you, but it's not what they normally do. My understanding is the Italians believe that the milk itself will not help your digestion of your lunch. You've got lactic acid in the milk and if you have some pasta with, like, tomato sauce or whatever, they believe that it will kind of fight with it. You won't have a good digestion. So they just simply stop. But there is a way around it. Right? And the one thing I learned is you can do a little bit of milk after 11:00. Just do an espresso macchiato. So you get espresso with just a small dollop of milk, and that seems to be okay. Probably because it's just such a small amount.

Katy

It's interesting because people say, oh, no, but I mean, they will give it to you if you want it. And the cappuccinos there are very good, as you've mentioned, Michael, so you will get it. But Michael is giving a really great explanation of why the Italians don't have it. And when you think about it logically, it kind of makes sense actually. It makes a lot of sense. I mean, if you have a big milky drink, which is in some culture - when we have in our culture, it's actually almost a meal in itself, actually, the big milky drink. So it doesn't make sense to really have one before your lunchtime. Are there any other coffee kind of rules? We should know?

Michael

Probably a couple of others. I think after a meal, typically dinner, certainly after lunch, I usually go ahead and have an espresso, and it gives me the strength to continue on after what is typically a pretty heavy, big meal. But espresso after a meal is okay, although I think in the evening rather than espresso, a lot of the Italians will do an Amaro. So it's also bitter like espresso, but it's alcoholic. I'm not sure how familiar folks are with the Amari, but it is typically a sweet, bitter drink made from typically many different herbs. And it's very regional. You can find these different tomorrow everywhere throughout Italy just slightly different. But the Italians believe something like that actually is a good way to help digest a meal. But an espresso is okay too.

Katy

Yeah, I'm not sure about those Amari. It's not really my taste. They're very herbaceous. It's an acquired thing. So they're very bitter. And they've got one called Strega down in the south, which my mother in law has, and it always comes out at Christmas time. And I'm like, no, no,

no Streg for me, I'm more of a Limononcello (I know that sounds a little bit basic), but I do love Limoncello.

Michael

No grappa. Are you a Grappa fan?

Katy

Yeah, I can do the gGrappa, but Amaro is definitely an acquired taste.

Michael

Yeah, for sure. Absolutely. The one other thing people do is they have what they call a corrected coffee or a caffè corretto. And that is a shot of Espresso with a little bit of Grappa. It could have Whiskey. It could have Sambuca or something like that is another nice thing to have in the afternoon is one example.

Katy

Yeah, I can do that. Actually, that's probably more my stuff. So, Michael, you'll be hopefully heading back to Italy soon. Where's the first place you're going to go to go get your first coffee?

Michael

Actually, I'm heading back to Italy in the Milan area, probably the first weekend of November. And so I'll be in Milan. I also need to visit some friends down in Piemonte, down in the Barola wine-making region, but I'm visiting some coffee makers and some roasters and some other folks in Milan at the end of the first week of November and looking forward to it, it should be great. I would love to be able to spend a bunch more time there, but it's going to be a relatively short trip, unfortunately.

Katy

I love Milano. There's something about that city. It's really got that combination of the culture, the historic culture and the exciting new Italian modern Italy. It's a really fun place, and I can't talk highly about it enough. Now, Michael, thank you so much for getting us up to speed on the coffee culture in Italy today. I'm sure there are many coffee lovers listening that would love to stay in touch with you and your adventures in coffee and travel. How can they do that?

Michael

Best place to reach me on the coffee side of things is I did launch a company called Dü Coffee. It's spelled du.coffee, and you can find me there. You can email me as well,

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michael@du.coffee. But Dü Coffee is something that came out of these travels to these different world cities and finding all these very rich coffee-centric cultures. In fact, Milan is one that we're focused on right now. But what we do is look to bring - kind of the flavors and the taste of coffee from a city or a coffee culture in a city, bring it home for folks to be able to enjoy here. We can't all hop on a plane right now and make it to Italy or to other countries right now. So this is a way to enjoy a coffee done in a style. So we're focused on Milan. I happen to feel that the coffee culture of Milan is really kind of the centerpiece of coffee culture in Italy, and we're going to be celebrating that so folks can reach me there if they'd like to hear more about it.

Katy

Oh, that sounds so exciting. Well, grassy Michael, I hope you have a great time in Milano and thank you for joining us on Untold Italy today.

Michael

Thank you. Grazie Mille

Katy

Mmmm Italian coffee. It truly is one of the simple and most delicious pleasures in life. And one that I look forward to enjoying again very soon.

I hope you enjoyed our virtual tour of the Italian cafe bar with Michael and now feel more knowledgeable and confident to order coffee Italian style when you arrive in Italy.

Make sure to carve out some time in your itinerary to visit one of the very special bars Michael mentioned in major Italian cities as well the local bar in small towns you are staying in. No doubt by the end of your stay the barista will know precisely how you like your coffee and you'll have worked out whether you need one or two sugars in your espresso

Please visit the episode show notes at untolditaly.com/95 if you would like the details of the wonderful cafe bars mentioned, as well as more information about Michael's company Du Coffee - a company that celebrates the rituals, culture and of course taste of coffee in destinations around the world -

That's all for today, I'm going to make myself a coffee and enjoy every sip as part of my daily morning ritual. We'll be back next week with insights and ideas on how you can enjoy more aspects of Italian culture when you visit

But until then it's "ciao for now"

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