

Untold Italy Episode 104 - Experiences to include in your Dream Trip to Italy

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 104.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Katy

Ciao! Benvenuti friends! It's Katy here with you today saying farewell to 2021 and a big welcome to 2022. I hope you're excited about the year to come. I know I am. 2021 did not live up to its promise of being way better than 2020 for many of us but I have faith that 2022 is going to be a very different year and one that my family and I return to Italy - at least once! - to make up for lost time and experiences and especially to give our friends there a huge hug!

At the time I'm recording this episode, things are still quite uncertain in Europe but what we do know is this. Late spring, summer and early autumn or fall in Italy over the past 2 years has been a time when the virus has not been so prevalent and we had many followers, listeners and readers share so many beautiful trips to Rome, the coast and all over Italy, particularly in 2021

We'll be spending the entire month of June traveling throughout the country and I am sooo excited. I have to say, I've only just recently finalised our travel plans - mainly because I couldn't decide where to go. But what I found was that accommodation is booking up very quickly so if you're planning to go, particularly in the summer months and up until October, please start making those bookings now.

Of course, if you'd like to join one of our amazing tours departing from late May until October, they are selling fast too.

We designed our tours so you can add them to an itinerary that includes some of Italy's major cities and regions - perhaps your favorites that you'd like to return to. The idea was that if you want a taste of the more hidden and out of the way regions of Italy you can do that with a small group of travelers with the same passion for Italian food, wine and culture; and relax and immerse yourself in our chosen region while we take care of logistics and share some of

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our favorite experiences that we just know you're going to love and be talking about for years to come.

We're traveling to Puglia and Matera - ancient lands full of fascinating surprises, stunning adriatic coast and unique towns and village, Piedmont - a celebrated food and wine region with gorgeous towns and villages that flies under radar but which is just a short trip from Milan, Umbria - wedged between Rome and Tuscany - where hilltop towns dot the horizon, olive groves cover the hills and the cuisine is rustic and delicious - this is where porchetta comes from! , Sicily - captivating island with a smouldering volcano and some of the most incredible food and wine you'll taste anywhere in the world and the Mermaid Coast - the stunning coastline just south of the Amalfi Coast and across to gorgeous Capri with a rich and ancient culture and celebrated Mediterranean cuisine.

We take care of everything - making sure you experience only the very best food and wine and discover truly local artisan crafts and wares. You'll meet the makers and forge a connection with this land - driven by your new found understanding of its people and culture.

There are only 14 places on each trip so we can provide you with the most special time possible. You can find out more at tours.untolditaly.com We can't wait to have you along for the ride.

I would say, if you're booking anything - tours, accommodation, and transport - book with complete knowledge and understanding of cancellation clauses and please, take out travel insurance to cover medical emergencies and repatriation should you fall ill abroad.

Many insurance companies now offer coverage for covid illness and cancellation these days. You absolutely need to read the fine print and understand force majeure clauses - that's where the companies revoke coverage if your home country raises its advisory to do not travel. But despite all those caveats we always take out travel insurance.

Just one slip on a cobblestone, a heart attack, or a bad bout of flu can be financially debilitating if you need to finance long term health care abroad and/or managing your trip home. I won't dwell on this but if you'd like information on what to look for in an insurance policy we've put some details into the show notes.

Ok onto the super fun part of today's show where I welcome back my dear friend, author Corinna Cooke, who writes the Glam Italia series of guides for Italy. Last year Corinna and I recorded a podcast episode on the more practical elements of itinerary planning - it's episode number 53 I believe - but this year we thought we'd delve into those experiences that you need to plan a little ahead for, that will take your Italy trip from great to potentially life-changing.

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Travel has a way of shifting your perspective no matter how you approach it but with the insight Corinna is about to share, you'll definitely enrich your experience when you visit our beloved Italia.

Katy

Benvenuta Corinna. Ciao and welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast.

Corinna

Ciao Katy. How are you? Are you all ready for the New year?

Katy

I am so ready. And I guess we should say Buon Anno to you and all our listeners. We're recording this a little early, but most people will be listening in the New year of 2022. And, look, I'm so excited for 2022. I'm going to make my triumphant return to Italy for a whole month in June.

Corinna

Oh, it's going to be amazing. It's going to be so incredible. I'm really excited about 2022 as well. It's going to be a really great year. Yeah.

Katy

I think hopefully things have settled down a little bit and we're getting into a rhythm of what life's like after these crazy past couple of years. So I don't know about you, but I'm pretty excited.

Corinna

I am, too.

Katy

Now I thought this is a time for a lot of people to do their planning - I thought we'd try and get everyone a little bit excited about how to craft their itineraries like we did last year, but with a little bit more focus on the experiences that we might have built into our itinerary. So there's a lot of logistical things that we talked about in the episode that we did last year. But sometimes it's those magical little things that you just don't quite know to add into your itinerary that makes it that extra little bit special. But before we get started, why don't you remind everyone of your connection with Italy and your background and how you came to fall in love with beautiful Italia?

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Corinna

Well, I started traveling there a million years ago when I was quite young, and I lived in London for several years when I was starting my career as a makeup artist. And I was backwards and forwards on the continent all the time. And Italy was the place that just absolutely spoke to my soul, like, no other place ever has since. And then, yeah, I would just travel there all the time. And I was constantly exploring. And I think I travel in a slightly different way than most people do. So down the line, I had somebody reach out to me on social media, and she said she really wanted to go to Italy, but she didn't want to go on a cruise, and she didn't want to go on a big bus tour. And her husband didn't travel, had no interest in it. And she said, I want to do the things I see in your photos. And I was like, oh, that's nice. And she said, so my husband had this great idea, why don't we pay you to take me? And I was like, Why don't you? So that's how I wound up with this little boutique tour business where I spend my summers, basically in Italy every year. So I'm there May, June, and I'm back again September, October, and I take small groups of women on these little boutique tours through the country. And then that parlayed into writing books. And so I have three books out. And hopefully this year, this coming year, the fourth one will come out. And the love affair just gets bigger and bigger doesn't go away.

Katy

It really doesn't, does it? I can't believe we've never actually met in person. But we do share this real strong bond over our love for Italy, and we're going to fix that very soon. And I can't wait. All right. So let's get started with those Italian experiences that you have got such a knack of crafting and that you can't miss. And we're very grateful to you for sharing these wonderful tips with us. So what's on the list for you?

Corinna

Well, I start off by - first of all, I think everybody needs to know that you'll remember the names of the big buildings in five years time you'll remember the Colosseum and the Vatican and things like that, but there'll be so many buildings that you'll be taking photos of and fountains and all the great things that in two years time, three years time, when you're looking through your photos, you won't even remember what they're called. So I always say to people, the things that you're going to remember are the things that you feel they're the experiences that have made you feel something. So as we're crafting experiences, we want to be in contact with that the things that make you just go like, you really feel it. And then part of that is the human connection. So when I'm building out my tours, I'm like figuring out these things. And I do this actually, when I travel for myself as well, where I'm not just doing a fun thing that I want to go and see and do, but I'm building into it like, is there going to be a human connection? Am I going to be able to interact with some other humans, some Italian humans and turn this into an experience that you actually feel. So when you look at making that list of the things that are your top absolute, 'I must do this when I'm in Italy' list, then we craft those experiences so we can really bring it home and it'll be something that's not just a

photograph that you have, but something that every time you look at that photograph, you get that right 'awww' right in your chest.

Katy

And you could probably even feel it in your mind's eye. If you're one of those really visual people that you can just close your eyes and you can take yourself there in a little moment.

Corinna

Yeah. And you know what I find with my tour travelers, and this has been going on for years now. They can still close their eyes and feel what it felt like to do whatever this thing was that really resonated with them. And that's I think when you hit the home run on your travel plan, you can't do that with every single thing. But you pick the things that are important to you. So one of the things I love to do, because we do spend a lot of time in the big, busy cities. So when you're thinking of, like your Venice and your Rome and your Florence and your Naples, and they're like, busy there's like, a lot going on. I love to one morning while I'm there, get up early and go walk the city early. So, for example, there's a huge difference if you're in Florence and you go walking around the city at 7:30 in the morning, 08:00 in the morning. And if you go to the exact same walk at 10:00 in the morning, they're like two completely different beasts. But when you're out there and you can go for a walk and you see everything unfettered and there's not people everywhere and you can kind of get a feel for the city. I absolutely love doing that. And you can kind of clear your brain and see everything. And I think that you really fall in love with the city when you see it like that. It's hard to fall in love quite as hard when there's, like, 75 bus loads all filling up the piazza.

Katy

It's true. I did a beautiful morning walk in Florence in 2019. I think it was - I had a bit of jet lag, so I got up at 6:30 in the morning (I know that's wrong for many people), but it was just the light that's bouncing off the Arno there and the buildings so special and you can stand on the Ponte Vecchio and there's no one else there. And you just have a moment and there's that magic.

Corinna

The same with Ponte Vecchio, where they have those fantastic old doors, those old ancient doors and they fold down onto one another and they are closed and locked with those big old locks that are, well, I think the locks have been retooled, but they look like they did since the beginning. So when you go over there in the morning and you're on the bridge, you can see everything kind of as it was. At night time there's still tons of people out all the time. So you don't get that unfettered view of it. And then those beautiful photos that you can take looking down the Arno from the middle of the Ponte Vecchio in the early morning, there's nobody there. So you're not like jostling in amongst people to try and get that shot or try and

get that selfie or whatever. It's all yours. You just do, you or you and influencers they're out there - a lot them too.

Katy

That's true. It's good to watch them in action sometimes.

Corinna

Yeah.

Katy

The morning walk. It's so beautiful. And so what other things do you do on your morning walk?

Corinna

So I have this whole thing where I put a lot of emphasis on that morning coffee and breakfast in Italy. So your breakfast is a cappuccino and a cornetto, which is a croissant. I always get them with pistachio cream, and

Katy

They're so good.

Corinna

They're so good!! And I swear, calories don't count in Italy this year, I was there for two months solid, and I had a croissant for breakfast every single day for 60 days straight and didn't gain so much as an ounce. So you got to factor in that coffee. But I feel like life is too short to have an Italian breakfast somewhere ugly. So what I do is when I'm out walking, and normally you're going to arrive in town at some point during the day. You don't normally arrive in before breakfast for your first day. And I do this whether I'm going back to a big city that I know or if I'm going to some town I've never been to before. When I'm out walking around, I'm scoping out, where is the perfect place for that breakfast?

Corinna

So if I'm in Tuscany or, Umbria, it might be somewhere close to the edge of the wall with the hill where I can sit there and look out over lines of olive trees and vines and everything. And that brings that incredible experience home. Or when I'm in Rome, for example, or any big city, I'm looking for some really cute little piazza that's got those nice textured buildings and that kind of ochre color and the vines going up the side. You see those all over Trastevere. But I'm scoping out the places during the day. And when I'm out walking and looking to see other Italians going in and out, or is it tour bus people because I only want to go where the Italians are going. So I scope this all out. So now when it's time for me to go for my Italian breakfast,

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I've made an experience out of it. So it's not just that the coffee tastes so good. It's not just the decadence of the cornetto and the pistachio cream. It's the whole ambiance all around me. And if I pick the place, right, Italians love to talk and they'll talk to you all the time. And that's that human connection. And half the fun of it when you can be sitting there and the waiter is like. "Oh, where are you from? What are you doing? Blah, blah, blah". And they start talking to you and you feel that connection. Now you're hitting all the buttons. You're somewhere beautiful, getting this great breakfast, you've got interesting things happening. And then if you go back there the next day, they're like, "hey you're back - you're going to have the same thing, cappuccino, right? You ordered this, you ordered that", and it just makes you feel really good. And then it's like this whole experience. My most recent tour group did five days in Rome. They specifically wanted five days in Rome. This was their second trip with me and their first trip - one of their favorite things was their coffee place to go to in the morning, and they'd sit there and watch the San Cosimato market and watch everything happening. And they just loved everything about this coffee place. And it had such a big emotional pull for them that they're coming back to Italy. We have to be, like, five days, and we want to be right in there. We want to go to our coffee shop again. And they were happy as happy could be every morning.

Katy

That sounds lovely. And was it just the same as they had left it?

Corinna

Yes, it was. And then it was like they were doing everything wrong with ordering things wrong and doing everything wrong. But the boys working in the shop just loved it. And they're like, don't worry about it. It's all good. And they could appreciate that these ladies were just so in love with everything about this morning routine that they just rolled with it. They're like, don't worry. And I came in and I'm like, oh, do you need me to fix this? They like, don't even worry about it - it's all good?

Katy

Yeah. So, Corinna, when you're walking around in the morning, do you get out your Google Maps - are you dropping pins and saving places? Is that how you remember where to go? Because that's what I do but the problem is now I've got a Google Maps with, like, about 500 yellow dots, and I'm like, I've got to remember to write notes on those one.

Corinna

Well, I'll take photos and things and find my way back that way a lot, because normally, when I'm off freestyling and exploring new places, they tend to be smaller towns and things that I haven't been to before. And that's kind of easier to find your way around. And also I've got a hopeless, like, if you said to me, how do I get to the airport from your house? I'd be like, I have no idea. If you said to me, how do you get to that place you had coffee at on Thursday

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in Rome, I'll be like, oh, look, okay. I'll give you blow-by-blow directions to get there. So I've got the selective memory.

Katy

It's tuned into coffee for sure.

Corinna

For sure!

Katy

And is it tuned into anything else?

Corinna

Well, yes, it is, because the other thing that I'm looking at all the time when I'm out walking around during the day, not only am I looking for where I'm going to have breakfast the next day, but I'm looking for where I'm going to have aperitivo. And aperitivo hour is my favorite time of the day in Italy. It's the greatest thing for those of you who don't know it's Italians at the end of the day on their way home from work, they stop and have an aperitivo. And if you're somewhere really touristy where there's a lot of tourist traffic, you'll probably get a bowl of potato chips with it. But when you get a little bit further back from that, they bring out these little wooden boards with some cheeses and some little bitey things and some little croquette, like all kinds of little snacky snacks. And it's the time to just sit and have a nice drink - like, normally, people will have a well, normally, but a lot of the time people will be having a spritz. You'll see these drinks that look like sunset all over the place, and they just sit there and talk. And I make this an event every single day. So for my tour groups, every single day, we have an aperitivo somewhere fabulous. And I do the same for myself. It's such a reward at the end of the day. So I'm always looking for either somewhere again, that's a really vibey, cool little piazza. If we're in Tuscany for sure, we're going to be on the wall of whatever walled town we're in. So we've got that view. I, like going up high in the places that have a good rooftop bar. I was always playing it out so that I know that sometime between, say, 4:30 and 7, I'm going to be somewhere fabulous and have my spritz like, half the time I actually have a lemon soda because I can't drink that much. And when I'm working I'm not always in the mood for having a spritz, but it's the participation in that social event. And then you'll find that if you go somewhere where it's not the tourists, you'll find that all the locals start talking to you and telling you about things. And the people from the next table over are like, oh, have you been to this place or, oh, look at that guy over there. He's the mayor's son, and he does all these bad things and you, like, get right into the..

Katy

All the gossip?

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Corinna

Yeah. And then trust me, that's the stuff you remember, like, crazy because you've had that human connection and you're doing this thing that's part of the culture. And I love it.

Katy

It's a ritual, isn't it? It's very Italian. And even like here in Melbourne, we try and recreate this. And I don't know, it doesn't quite work for some reason. Maybe I was going to say nosy, but in each other's business so much, because if I just went over to the next table here, everyone are you crazy, but it really works in Italy. It's lovely, isn't it?

Corinna

We had this fantastic one in Arezzo. I had one of my tour groups staying in Arezzo, and we were sitting there at this beautiful little outdoor bar space, and it was opposite one of the churches that had this big, huge, big front entrance to it. And there was something going on. There was like some event going on and there's all these people all dressed up and there's all these Carabinieri there. And I think it was actually a celebration of the Carabinieri, but that took some figuring out. So I'm trying to figure out what's going on and scoping out the outfits and everything. And literally, this dude from the next table goes "so let me tell you what's happening here" and start filling us in. And the ladies I was traveling with were just like, oh, my gosh, this is the best. And then people from the other tables were going "now see that one there, this person here", blah, blah, blah, blah. And this one here, blah, blah, blah. And then it was like this four table conversation with just these really nice people. And it was just a tremendous experience.

Katy

It's the best. It's the best. I can't wait to have it all again.

Corinna

Yeah. There you go.

Katy

Right. We've covered off our coffee and our aperitivo and like, I have to say, I agree with you, Corinna - they are some of the most important things that you can even imagine doing initially. And it would be a shame to pack too much into a day to not have those beautiful experiences, I think. So, make sure you've carved out a chunk of time at the end of each day for your coffee and you're an aperitivo and you won't regret it.

Corinna

Absolutely.

Katy

Okay. What other experiences can you share with us that you think are just absolutely must do when we go to Italy?

Corinna

Well, I'm a huge fan of ancient Rome. And when I say ancient Rome, for those of you who haven't been to Italy, I'm talking about the ancient Roman Empire. So it's like the lengths and breadth of the country. It's not just the city of Rome. There are so many amazing bits and pieces to see, like, so many towns, like, just randomly you walk around the corner and there's a first-century Roman Amphitheater with grass growing over it. And it's just there. And I still get all these years in, I still get a huge thrill out of that. So I always try and find some things to go and see that involve ancient Rome and seeing this civilization that's 2000 years old. I learned this really cool thing not too long ago was that ancient Rome was the most advanced society on Earth. All the things that they cooked up, everything from designing sewage systems for their cities and design the infrastructure of their cities and all these technologies that they invented. And then when the Empire fell and we went into the dark Ages, all that knowledge was lost until the 1800 hundreds, which just blows my mind. I think it's incredible. And all over Italy, there are all these places to experience a touch of ancient Rome. And there's so many places where you can go underground, like churches that have underground parts to them or all kinds of different restaurants that were built on top of a Roman Amphitheater. And you can go down there and see those arc shapes and see where all these different things were. And I think it's a real shame to just run around taking photos of monuments and fountains when there's things like that that you can go and see it and breathe it and feel it and touch it and experience this piece of ancient Rome.

Corinna

Yeah. And there's such a great connection back to our own lives, because even though there was that really Dark Ages period, we have borrowed so much from that era that you don't even realize I was talking to a friend last night, and she's real freak about ancient Roman everything. Her hero is Julia Caesar, and she has this whole Caesar plan mapped out for her trip to Italy, which is going to be epic. But she was telling me that the original train line tracks and the distance between the tracks, apparently it's the same size as the chariots for ancient Rome. I haven't had a chance to fact-check this yet. If she's listening.

Corinna

Well, you can fact-check it in Pompeii. In Pompeii, there's all these places we could actually see those tracks because the original roads are all still there. And Pompeii is one of my favorite, favorite things to do. I take all my tour groups through Pompeii, and that comes with

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some strategy, which I want to get into as well. But for those of you that don't know about Pompeii, it's a town that basically was buried when Mount Vesuvius went off, and for 17 hundred years, it was disappeared. Then they rediscovered it, and it's still only partially been excavated. But you actually are walking down Roman roads, and they invented things like what we now use as a zebra crossing. And they invented one-way roads and two-way roads. And they had all these cool traffic signals, like traffic directions and everything. It's really neat. But walking in Pompeii, you can look down and see the grooves and some of the roads where the chariots went. And if you look at it, you go, yeah, that is train track distance apart.

Katy

My other favorite thing from Pompeii - and last year we had an episode. If anyone is really interested in Pompeii to have to listen to this with Danielle Oteri, and she's talked about lots of different sites around Pompeii. But there is a new finding there, which is like a takeaway shop, which I call Pompeii fried chicken, but it wasn't really fried. It was more of a soup, but they had even got the picture of the chicken like it had survived this fresco. I just love it.

Corinna

It's crazy. This is the most amazing place to see, but I think that if anyone is listening, they're planning on going, oh, yeah, I want to go to Pompeii. This one comes with some strategy. If you're going between May and October, Pompeii gets unbelievably hot and it's in this kind of base and it gets unbelievably humid and there's not really any break from the sun. So what I do with my groups is I have us in right when the gates open at nine. So we arrived there about 838 40, where frequently the first one is through the gate. And I always go with a guide. I have a guide that I use down there because the number of incredible stories that you will otherwise just not know about if you're going on your own is huge. But being there first thing in the morning, making sure you have a hat and really comfortable shoes and water because you're going to get really hot and there's not a ton of places to fill up with water.

Katy

No. And it's really poorly marked. So it's one of those places where you can wander around and you can get a feel for it. But my goodness, if you hear the stories, it'll just kind of blow your mind like, well, one of my favorite places there is the vineyard where they re propagating the vines that originally grew at that time. I just think it's a fascinating story. Imagine they had all these vines set up and you can get that view of Vesuvius in the background with the vines in the foreground. And it's just one of my favorite photos that I have. I love it.

Corinna

It's incredible and a licensed private guide for Pompeii is not expensive. It's not going to break the bank by any stretch of the imagination and the stories that they tell you. I find that to be

just overwhelming and I do it all the time. And I have the same guide all the time and she always adds new things. We'll go to some other building that we haven't been to before or whatever just to keep me entertained. But listening to her telling the stories, I'll learn something new each time because today she's thinking, "oh, I see this thing here this, etching on the wall. That was a thing that said, Suzy, meet me here at 07:00 on Friday and there's Suzie saying, no, I'm going out with Roger". There are so many crazy fascinating things there. But if you go to Pompeii first and you learn how an ancient Roman home was set up, Where's the front door? Where's the back door? What are the different parts that make up an ancient Roman home and how these streets work and all the rest of it? If you then go to Paestum, which is Paestum, is at the bottom of the Amalfi Coast. It's like another 30 km on. And it's where the three Greek temples are. And they're from, like, 580 BC, 500 BC and 460 BC. These are really old. They're incredible. And then there's a Roman town built all around it. And you just go freestyling walking all through these unbelievable 2000 year old Roman streets and walk into these houses and having been to Pompeii and knowing how it's all set out, you can go, oh, look, this is the front door and they looked over the temples so that's the back door and they're looking out over the ocean, and you can just see how it was all set up. And it's fantastic. It's one of my favorite things. I just did it again recently. I just did it again in October and spent a day there. And it was so great.

Katy

Yeah. I found that whole experience to see the difference between the Greeks and the Romans and the Romans did like to improve on what the Greeks did. I would say. And most people know that my husband's from Italian background, and he tells my kids the Romans invented everything. I have to say that the Greek temples at Paestum and Agrigento in Sicily are absolutely incredible, and they're actually bigger than a lot of the Roman ones, actually, but they're probably in some ways, not as ornate anyway. Totally. You have to go and see the ancient ruins.

Corinna

Yeah, absolutely. It's phenomenal. And it just brings everything into perspective because it's very easy to get caught up just seeing the big cities and the big sites and not really getting in contact with where this all began and just how incredible Italy and its history are. I'm still always blown away anything I see that's 2000 years old still just fries my brain.

Katy

I know the Pantheon. Oh, my gosh, just crazy. And what about there's some special things you can do. I know when I was in Rome last time, I had the most amazing experience going into Catacombs, a very special experience with a local lady who could only access these Catacombs herself because she had a special key from her Church where she was one of the custodians. It was so amazing because I'm a bit of a scaredy-cat, and it wasn't one of those bones catacombs, basically, you can go down and see the burial areas, but there was no bones left in them, so I was okay. But it was so interesting and so raw and like, she was able to

explain everything and how it was connected to other parts of the city because this was actually on Janiculum Hill within Trastevere and so I mean the whole stories that she was telling and how you could actually - they were covered up in the I believe and since then, you're not allowed to go in there because there was a few dodgy things happening in those catacombs, I think. But yeah, getting in underground as well is such a fun thing to do.

Corinna

Yeah. And I don't know if your listeners know this or not, but modern Rome today is a good, like, 25 meters, I guess, higher than Rome was when Julius Caesar was cruising around. So you have 2000 plus years of dirt and dust and building and everything else that goes on. And so now we're that much higher. So it's really exciting to go down below ground and just see ancient Roman homes and all the treasures and things that are still down there. It's incredible. And these mosaic floors that have survived 2000 years of wars and craziness and poverty and riches and everything else that's happened in those 2000 years. And here's these mosaic floors and they're beautiful and they're perfect. And they're just there.

Katy

It gives me shivers.

Corinna

Oh, me too. I love it. And there's lots of churches that you can go below, decks in - go down underground. They've opened up several old apartment buildings. Romans invented apartment buildings. How nutty is that? Some of them are, like eight stories high, and you can go down there and look at all these cool things or go down and see aqueducts - like the aqueduct that feeds the Trevi Fountain. You can go down and see that and walk around in there. And it's really cool.

Katy

Amazing. There's just so many things that they did back in those days that we've borrowed and improved, or I don't even know sometimes if we've improved on them, but anyway, but we've definitely borrowed a lot. But now one of the most amazing things about Italy is you've got this incredible contrast of the old and new. And I think one thing that you mentioned to me earlier before we joined the podcast was like one of the favorite experiences that your guests like to do is travel on a high speed train.

Corinna

Yeah, I think it's kind of a must, because even when I have people who live on the East Coast of the United States, they do have trains there, but nothing like these high speed trains that take you from clear across one side of Italy to the other. And they're so fast. I always liken it to being inside of a National Geographic episode because they have these enormous picture

windows and you're sitting in these leather comfy chairs and it's so civilized. They're bringing you cups of coffee. Well, they're little coffees, but the views out the windows are so breathtaking. And like I've done the stretch between Florence and Naples more times than I could even count. Backwards and forwards and backwards and forwards every year, like Florence, Rome, Rome, Florence, Florence, Naples, backwards and forwards - and to me, it's my favorite train trip. I think it's just so beautiful, and you never tire of saying, oh, look, there's another castle on the hill. Oh, look, there's another castle on the hill and the trees and the landscape and everything. It's so beautiful. And it's such a great experience and such a great way to move across the country. I look at it to go from - I'm in Phoenix, so if I want to go to Los Angeles or if I want to go to Las Vegas, really, I have to fly unless I want to spend 6 hours or so in a car. And then with flying, you have to get to the airport early. You have to check your bags. You have to go through ... like it's just a whole lot of drama, whereas there you just roll on in, jump on the train, put your bag in the luggage thing or in the thing above the seat and away you go. And it's so fast. It's just tremendous.

Katy

I think I took a photo from the last time when we went to Naples. The train gets up to 300 km an hour. Which is just you must have been going on Intelo. That's my favorite. I always book Italo. I think it's such a great train, and it's so beautiful inside. But all of my tour travelers, they always come back to that. And they always talk about it about how great of an experience it was to travel across the country, whether we're going from Florence up to Venice or we're going down to Naples or wherever it is that we're going to just that whole experience and seeing that this is how Italians live their life.

Corinna

This is how they get about places and, of course, being Italians, they're not cruddy old, nasty trains like we have here - they're like chic.

Katy

They're totally beautiful. And I think the other thing is it's so convenient. Oh, my goodness. It might seem a little bit chaotic when you're at the station and there's all these platforms and all that. But at the end of the day, you're going from the center of one city to the center of another in very quick amount of time, and you don't have to worry about parking. And you don't have to worry about historic zones and getting stuck. It's so civilized. It's very Roman.

Corinna

It's so civilized. And the chaos of the train station is only chaotic until you understand the system. When you understand how it works and how to figure out the next step of what you have to do, then it becomes quite smooth and you just function through it like, I know my first time trying to do the trains on my own, I was like, what on Earth is going on here? And then as soon as I understood it, I was like okay great. And I was like, oh, and ever since then,

I buzzed all over the place on the trains and somewhat oblivious to the chaos because I know what I'm doing. And there's lots of blog posts and videos. And I have it in one of my books. I have a blow by blow how to do the train station. Because once you've got that sorted out, then it's all just fun.

Katy

Yeah. You just have to flick your scarf and put your sunglasses on and off you go. And then there's another form of transport that you love, too, isn't there Corinna?

Corinna

A gondola. So it's one of those things that I hear a lot of people say, oh, that's so touristy. And I'm like, well, come on - you're in Venice, this is part of Venice's history. This is part of Venice's culture. And where else are you going to go for a ride and a gondola. So I think if going for a ride in a gondola is something that's on your list of things that you'd like to do when you're in Italy, this is an experience that we have to craft properly because there are two experiences there. One is that mass tourism cruise ship crowd where they're all just going through, like they're on a factory line. And it's not really a special experience. And when you look at them too, they always try to crowd as many people into the gondola as possible - so they're each only paying €10 instead of whatever else it costs. And I think that's approaching it the wrong way. So first of all, I tell my groups ahead of time. If you want to go on a gondola ride, we do two people to a gondola. This whole deal is set up so that you're sitting side by side in those beautiful velvet chairs, seeing what you're supposed to see, seeing how it is supposed to be. If you've got people sitting along the sides, they're blocking your view. And then it's like, what are they doing on the sides? It looks stupid. I just think it takes away from the experience. So you want just two of you in there, so you budget for it and go, okay, it's going to be €40 apiece, and maybe that's expensive for you, but you budget for it. But then two, you have to figure out where you're going. So a lot of people will say, I want to do a gondola down the Grand Canal. Now - I couldn't honestly think of anything worse because by taking a gondola down the superhighway. Grand Canal is the main thoroughfare. It's where all the vaporetti I go. It's where the taxis are zooming up and down the delivery boats - so you've got perpetually rough water. And your gondola is perpetually having to steady this thing and maneuver around. And I don't think that's the maximum experience. So we'll leave the cruise ship people to that and then what I do with my groups is I actually have specific ones that I go to. What we do is we look at places like Cannaregio, Castello, which is up where I stay, Dorsoduro - you get into these neighborhoods where you're away from the main tourist crowd and there's gondola stands everywhere - all over. And as you're walking past the gondoliers are going to say, "Gondola ride? Gondola ride" and what I do or like, now I have my people, but the way I found my people was you look to see who's got a really nice smiley face, like who looks like they're frustrated with tourists and don't want to see another tourist in their life. That's not who you want to be with, but there's plenty that I just have chatty, smiley, lovely faces. So walking along, you spot someone who's going, hey, "Gondola ride" and looks friendly and smiley. And I'll be like, "hey. So where does your gondola go? And how much does it cost?"

And how long is the ride". I'll engage him in talking because that's Italian's favorite thing to do is talk to you. And then I'll be like, "What's your name?" And they'll be like, "Marco", I'm like, "okay, Marco", chat, chat, chat. And then I'll be like, "Well, I've got to go do this thing I'm going to be doing. But are you working here the rest of the afternoon?", and he'll be like, "oh, yes, I'm here till seven" whatever. So now go off and do whatever I was going to do. But then I come back and I'll be like, 20 minutes later, half an hour later, whatever. If he's not there, he's like, a half hour away. So I'll say to whoever else is there, "hey, when's Marco coming back? And they'll be like, "he'll be back in 15 minutes" or whatever. So I'll either hang out and wait for him or go away and come back. But when I see him, I'm like, "hey, Marco, I come from my ride", and the whole game has changed because Italians, the first time they see you're a stranger, second time they see you, you're friends. And he's going to be so thrilled that I've remembered his name. And out of all the gondoliers all over Venice, I've come back to him. So that's already set us up for a brilliant experience. And then it's just two to a gondola. So you're both sitting back in that beautiful velvet seat and you're looking forward as the gondola is going (the way it's supposed to be). And I'll get him talking. I'll get him telling me stuff, like, what's that palazzo, what's that place? And the way he goes, chat, chat, chat, chat. And he'll be telling you all these things, and it just changes the whole experience. And there's two things that I always watch out for - like, if you're in Venice, just walking along anyway, keep an eye out for this. Or if you're in a gondola, watch for it, you won't see it with your gondola. But there's this thing that I call the Gondola ballet. And as they're coming into tight corners, like 90 degree turns and stuff, they don't want their gondola to scrape against the wall. So the leg just kind of goes out like a ballet dancer and doesn't kick off. It just does this gentle nudge. And there's this whole thing happening with what they're doing with the oar and how they're balancing the boat and the leg going out. And I always call it the Gondola ballet. And then there's the Gondola opera. Whereas they're coming into a blind corner, they call out to each other. And it's almost like a sing-song, like an opera that they're doing. And if you're watching out for those things and you're just sitting in the seat the way you're supposed to be sitting in and you're not out in the hubbub of mad tourist land, it can turn something as simple as a gondola ride into one of the greatest experiences of your life.

Katy

And there's so much history and passion and artistry behind the whole thing. If you're interested in that, to learn about that in more detail, we've got an earlier episode that we'll link to in the show notes that you actually go through so much of the history of the gondola, but, yeah, it's such a special experience. I don't think you can go to Venice and resist. I can't anyway.

Corinna

Yeah, I think if it's on your list, do it, just don't do it along the Grand Canal. You don't need that. Save that for the mass tourists. Go to somewhere just as you're walking around inside the neighborhoods and you're going to see them all over. And also people think, oh, I want to take a gondola under the Bridge of Sighs. And I'm like, I can't think of anything worse because

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first of all, it's a prison bridge. It's not romance. And secondly, it's gondola traffic jam because all these people want to do it. And so it's just packed with gondolas. So that's not I on my list.

Katy

Yeah. Go just a few little canals backwards, and you find a much more peaceful, I would say, and more relaxing experience. And I just love the sound of the oar and the water.

Corinna

Awww.

Katy

Just makes me sigh, too.

Corinna

It's magical. It really is. And if you think about how stressed out we get if we get stuck in the middle of a throng of tourists, like, when you're in a real touristy place, it's full of tourists. It makes you feel kind of anxious so you can't be your chill, relaxed, normal self - I think that's how it is with them, too. So when you cut back and go into these quieter areas, it's fabulous.

Katy

Yeah. All right, Corinna, what about when we're in the countryside? What should we do?

Corinna

Well, I have a fair few things that I like to do there. There's two things specifically that I would suggest - one of them is do a little research before you go and see if there's any abandoned towns around where you're going. Now, if you're going to be in the middle of the Chianti - no, there's not going to be any, you're not going to get to go and explore them. But like, I was just down in Basilicata and was in this town that was mostly abandoned and there's all these amazing old palazzi, like, they are centuries old and they're empty and partly fallen down, but mostly not. It was just incredible walking around there and trying to figure out what life was here and who are the people that owned these homes? And why have they gone? And where did they go? It's really cool. So I love doing that. One of my friends and I, we used to do these trips to Tuscany, and we'd have no agenda. We just have a rental car and would stay, actually in San Gimignano and every day we just point the car in a different direction and just go and see what we found. And that was one of my most favorite travel experiences because we would find abandoned houses and we just pull over and go, like, look through them. It's really cool to just get off the beaten path and discover things. Another thing that I think everyone should factor into their trip, if at all possible, is to go to a winery. And again, I have criteria for that as well, because I don't want to waste my time going through a winery that has the big bus tours coming through. That's not the vibe that I want. So I research, like,

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boutique wineries that are just small, that don't necessarily. You're not going to find it in the supermarket here in America. And I like to find family-owned wineries with the families multiple generations deep and it sounds like that's a lot to look up. No, they're everywhere. They're all over the place. But what happens when you go to a winery like that is you have the family's passion is to tell you about their family and their story and the story of their wines and the Villa that the family has lived in for generations. And they'll show you all these cool bits and pieces. And it's like this wine is in their DNA. This property is in their DNA, and you have this whole different experience. So many of them, the little ones are - we would call it organic - they call it bio. So they do everything in a natural kind of way. And they'll explain to you the fruit trees that they have there and why and how old they are and how they rotate all the vegetables that they grow around the property and what that does. And you have this whole different experience. And then when you're sitting down to have your wine tasting, everything - the foods they're bringing out have all come from in this immediate area, like the cheeses that you're eating come from the farm next door and the prosciutto, the guy just cut it just before you got there. And the bread - mama makes the bread every day. And you have this whole again, it's a human connection with the thing that you're doing. You have this fully fleshed out experience, and they really, truly care. They're not just doing a job, collecting a paycheck and going home, or they're not just shuttling another bus tour through. And here's your red wine. Here's your white wine. Here's the order form. Now you hustle on out because there's a new bus coming. It's not like that. You really get a feel for life on the land and for the history of these families.

Katy

Yeah. And they somehow managed to produce these completely unique experiences, whether it's going to be a picnic in the vineyard or something in their cellar or they've got a special room and it's all laid out with beautiful linens and, oh, it's just incredible. And also there are so many wines in Italy and so many different styles. I think people should really do a little bit of research and find out what type of wine they like and sort of have a look around the regions that they're going and see how that's going to fit in. I mean, obviously, if you're a real wine aficionado, you're probably going to be looking for some of the wines in Piemonte, the Barolos and that type of thing. But if you're new to wine or you're just interested to have that experience, I mean, like, Chianti is a great region to go to because it's right there on the doorstep of Florence.

Corinna

And you have so many things that you can comfortably do in one day, like with having a winery experience - exploring some of these little towns, having an aperitivo somewhere beautiful. There's all these things that you can build that are all right on each other's doorstep, which is kind of cool, too. I just love it. And then, like I tell you, I have a friend who's a photographer here that I work with, and he was going out on a trip to Italy, and I help him put it together. And I had him for a day with one of my drivers in Tuscany. And the driver had said, oh, I'll take you to this fabulous winery for lunch. And my friend and his wife, they

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don't drink and they're vegetarians. So the driver calls ahead to the winery and says, okay, I have this couple I want to bring because it's beautiful and it's little and it's boutique and gorgeous home and gorgeous restaurant and everything. But he just called ahead and said, okay, so they don't actually drink alcohol, and they don't eat meat. And it was a family-owned business. So the family is like, no problem. We'll have something else for them to drink. And mama will make something different, or nonna will make something different for their lunch. And my friend said that of their entire trip, that experience was the single greatest, like the thing that just resonated in their soul and the fact that this family were, like, no problem, we'll make you something else to eat. And here's grape juice and here's sparkling water. And they just made it into this incredible experience. So even though I talk about a lot of alcohol things - going to wineries, going for aperitivo - going and doing these things, these are all things that you can be somebody that doesn't drink and have just as wonderful as an experience. Or you can be having a day where maybe you do love wine. But you wake up this day and you're like, oh, my Lord, I don't want to drink anything. You can still fully engage and have an incredible experience at aperitivo time or at the winery without having to have alcohol, which I think is quite good, too.

Katy

Italian hospitality is second to none, really, isn't it? No one does it better.

Corinna

It's incredible. And you've got to watch out for nonna. Don't let nonna know you're hungry because nonna - she's going to bring out the food.

Katy

Corinna - my feet are so itchy I just can't wait to get on that plane and go. And this has been such a brilliant reminder of all the things I need to remember to do and including our itinerary. So listeners, if you would like to stay in touch with Corinna and learn about her tours and upcoming book releases and much more, she can now tell you how you're going to do that.

Corinna

Well, you can come to my website, which is corinnacooke.com, and I think Katy will probably put that on the show notes and on social media - I really mostly just do Instagram because I can't keep up with all the others so you can find me at @corinnatravels on Instagram. Yeah. And then my books are sold worldwide on Amazon. They're exclusive to Amazon, and they're everywhere and keep getting like bestseller tags and stuff. So it's kind of exciting.

Katy

Oh, my goodness. You're so modest. It's ridiculous. She's doing so well. And their books are the Glam Italia Guides, and they're very fabulous.

Corinna

Thank you.

Katy

And she also has a wonderful newsletter full of beautiful tips and interesting, pretty places that you need to know about. So you should definitely sign up for that, too. And I think that's on your website.

Corinna

Yes, it's on the website. And then everybody, just remember when you're planning your trip, plan to really build some great experiences. Think about human connection. Think about those things that are really important to you, how you're going to make going and doing that thing, whether it's a gondola ride or it's going to see Julius Caesar's Rome or whatever it is crafted into an experience that you can really feel - that you will keep with you forever. Because trust me, if someone has been there a whole lot, you do keep this stuff with you forever.

Katy

You really do. Grazie Corinna, thank you so much for being my podcasting buddy again on Untold Italy today.

Corinna

Thank you for having me. And this is going to be the most amazing year. So happy New Year to everybody.

Katy

Buon Anno. Ciao!

Katy

I am sooo excited, even more excited about our trip now. There's something about chatting with Corinna that makes me want to swim to Italy from Australia - haha. So as you can imagine I try to chat with her as often as I can! If you've loved this chat, why not come along and join us in Untold Italy Amici - our online club for people who love Italy as much as we do.

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Corinna and I are joined by fellow Italy lovers and travelers and we share our ideas, secrets and plans with people just like you who could spend all day dreaming about travel in Italy. Last month Corinna and I had a live session where she shared her top secret special places and experiences that she usually shares only with family and friends in our monthly Zoom call.

I just loved seeing the faces of our members light up when she shared some of her favorite gorgeous towns of Tuscany that never appear in guidebooks and a family winery in Chianti with an incredible history, story of survival and respect for generations past, present and future. We were all furiously taking notes but that wasn't necessary! The replay is available to watch on demand for all members in video and audio format plus of course we provide detailed show notes.

In January our friend Pierpaulo has promised to spill the beans on secrets of the Amalfi Coast, Naples and surrounds. I'm so excited for this. Paulo is a licenced tour guide for the area and also a local. He is uniquely placed to know the special things that visitors love but will probably never find without his help. If you want to join us live and ask questions you'll need to join us in Untold Italy Amici. All the details are on our website at untolditaly.com/amici

I've put a link there in your podcast app and also in our show notes at untolditaly.com/104 where you'll also find Corinna's details and information on all her suggestions.

And can I ask a favour? If loved this episode and you know a friend, family member or colleague who has dreams to visit Italy and is looking for some inspiration, please pass on this episode. Our aim is to help people all around the world have the same dreamy experience of this beautiful country that we do.

Ok, that's all for today. I hope you are super excited about getting your Italy planning underway for 2022, 2023 and beyond. Let's look to the future and fill those trips with all the beautiful experiences that you're dreaming of.

I'll be back next week with some mouthwatering ideas from one of the premier food and wine regions in Italy that you may not know too much about. But until then it's Ciao for now!