

Untold Italy Episode 105 - Foods you need to try in Piedmont

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 105.

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! Buon Anno! Happy New Year to all our amazing listeners from around the world! Here's hoping 2022 brings inspiration, fun and long lunches in Italy with the people we love or, for those of you traveling solo, the ultimate adventure! I've just put the finishing touches on our June trip and am optimistic it will go ahead as planned. It's going to be amazing! 30 days exploring from north to south, uncovering new places, revisiting favorites (ciao Roma!) and dropping in on friends old and new. I really can not wait to get there. Andiamo! Let's go!

We'll be spending lots of time in lesser-known regions like Umbria, Emilia-Romagna and Liguria and to be honest, this makes me so excited. Delving into these hidden pockets of Italy is such a joy for me. I love the friendly locals who are curious to discover what brought you there; their passion for their homeland - its history, unique local dishes, wine and culture and the stunning beauty of landscapes that many visitors to Italy miss when they beat a path to the most popular places on the map.

One such region is Piedmont, tucked up in the north west of Italy on the border of France and Switzerland. With a royal heritage, gorgeous rolling hills covered in vineyards, a reputation for some of the finest food and wine in Europe, and easy proximity to Milan, it always surprises me that Piedmont doesn't get more attention. It's classic "untold Italy" if you will and that's why we're delighted to be taking groups there on tour in 2022 and 2023 on culinary adventures to discover its secrets, meet winemakers, hunt for truffles, and make pasta. And of course discover and eat the local dishes, of which there are many.

Joining me today is my friend and colleague Olivia Windsor who will be leading Untold Italy's tours in Piedmont and who has a boundless passion for the food and wine of the region. Olivia is a local of Turin, the capital of Piedmont and dedicates her days to sniffing out the very best cheese, intimate wine experiences and tastiest dishes. What a life eh? And she wants to share it with you and the whole world. I've asked her along today to take us on a virtual tour of the

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must-try dishes of Piedmont so you'll be prepared and know what to order or try when you visit either on your own steam or with us on tour.

Because, as you'll learn, if you weren't already aware, Italian food is very regional and varies from town to town, district to district. You won't find the best carbonara here (that's a dish from Rome) or many fresh fish dishes (it's too far from the coast) but you will find truffles, and rich pasta dishes and some of the most delicious antipasti or appetizers in the land!

So let's find out what to eat in Piedmont.

Katy

Benvenuta Olivia, welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast.

Olivia

Ciao. Katy, thanks so much for having me.

Katy

Oh, and Buon Anno to you too. Hope 22 is going to be a much better year.

Olivia

Definitely Katy. Definitely. Hope to see everyone here in Italy.

Katy

That would be great, wouldn't it? Okay, everyone. As I mentioned earlier, Liv is leading our Untold Italy tours in Piedmont, so I thought it would be great to hear from her all about her passion for the cuisine and culture of this Northern Italian region. But first, Liv, can you share your story? How did you end up living in Italy and immersing yourself in Italian food and wine?

Olivia

I've been living in Italy for a few years now. I'm originally from Australia. As you can probably tell by my accent. I moved in 2019, pre COVID, and I thought I'd just come for a year. I'd have a year exploring Italy, learning the language, getting immersed in the food and wine. And what ended up happening was I came. I thought that my Italian was probably a lot better than it actually was. And I quickly realized that when I was in Bologna, where I was first living with an Italian family, and it was pretty impossible to communicate with them at the start because they didn't speak any English. I went to school in Bologna and got my Italian up to a slightly better level. But it's still, I think a lifelong journey, probably learning Italian - for me anyway. And then I sort of traveled from south to north. I worked in different agriturismi, so they're like the farm hotels with really good local food and all organic. And then I also worked in

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some different wineries. And it was actually in the September, which is when the wine harvest kicks off in Italy that I came up to Piedmont.

Olivia

So I found this winery called Cascina Luli which I've spoken about before. They're an organic, family run winery, quite small. Everything is handpicked. And I decided to do the Vendemmia, the wine harvest there. So in the September, I just fell in love with Piedmont during that time. It's probably my favorite time in this region. But you can just imagine the excitement of the wine harvest. There's all these long, beautiful lunches in the sun, a big sense of conviviality. There was family, there was nonna baking the Crostata. The first night I was there, actually, it was the owner's birthday dinner. So we had this amazing feast, different beautiful bottles of wine being pulled out. So, yeah, you can see why I fell in love with it. And then from there, I went into the truffle season, where I literally go with the owner of the winery into his backyard. Now, let's just say this isn't a normal backyard. Obviously, it was like a forest, and we would go truffle hunting because they had a truffle dog. So the dog sniffs out the truffles and look, it wasn't super easy. We'd maybe gone for a couple of hours tracing around on the forest floor looking for these truffles. But we found them every time. And you'd come back to the house, you'd make some pasta, shave over some freshly grated truffle. And you can definitely see why I fell in love with Piedmont in fall or autumn. And then after that, I moved to Turin, where I've lived ever since I met my now boyfriend and sort of the rest of history. I'm here and loving and living in Piedmont.

Katy

Yeah. And Liv's just - she's just really thrown herself into life there. And I just really admire the passion that she has for not just the food and wine, but the whole culture, the rhythm of life, shall we say in Piedmont and it is a truly beautiful region. And I think maybe people may not know exactly where it is and they sort of might be thinking, okay, maybe you've heard of it. You might have heard of Barolo wine, but where is it exactly Liv?.

Olivia

So we're talking all the way up north, on the border with France, it's on the West Coast, but it's landlocked. So we've got Liguria. And then if you go across it's Piedmont. So it's actually not that far from Milan. It's an easy, just over an hour train ride if you get the fast train. But, yeah, it's quite often overlooked. So when you do come to Turin, you're not as likely to hear English voices or see sort of more Western tourists, which is also part of its charm. It's a little bit more hidden.

Katy

I think so. I think it's gorgeous. Okay. So now it also has a very strong culinary tradition, and it's a very unique culture. There's a lot of royalty and royal history in particular. And so maybe we should start by telling people the geography of the region actually really influences its

produce and the dishes. And we're going to be talking about the dishes today. So let's start with the geography and say, well, what are we actually producing in Piedmont? Because obviously in Italy, we eat very regionally. So what are the things that they produce in Piedmont?

Olivia

Okay. So there's a few different things. The first one is rice - rice is really big in certain areas of Piedmont. So we're talking about Vercelli and Novara, and actually 50% of Italy's rice is produced in Piedmont. So obviously, with the rice, we're going on to make risotto and those kind of dishes, the rice is a big one. Something else that's famous from Piedmont is the hazelnuts, specifically from the Langhe region. Yeah. And there's a certain type of hazelnut. So they're called the tonda gentile variety. And that's actually the best in the world. So when you're having hazelnuts in Piedmont you know that you're eating the best in the world, and it's really interesting. It's all because of the soil in the Langhe. So they tried to grow the same hazel. They tried to plant the trees in the US, and it didn't work. They couldn't produce the same flavor. Currently, you can only get this variety of hazelnuts from Piedmont and from Le Langhe to the wine, where Borolo is as well, from that region, it's all down to the soil.

Katy

It's not just the soil, though, is it? It's the whole environment. It's the weather, it's the water, water is obviously coming down from the Alps there. And maybe we don't have a good appreciation of all of that when we come from different countries. But in Italy, you definitely do. You have that sense of connection to the land. And so you know that at certain times of the year, you're going to have certain food or produce. And then from that you'll have certain type of dishes as well, won't you?

Olivia

Yeah. Exactly. There's a few other things that I've mentioned in the intro. Obviously, we've got truffles. So the most special being the white truffle from the Alba area, and again with white truffles, so black can be taken to other countries and farmed. But white truffles, you can't. So really like there's lots of different places in Italy that have white truffles. But Piedmont has its special variety, which is just found in Alba and the surrounding area. So that's really special. And obviously with the matching price tag. And then we've got all the cheeses. If anyone wants to know more about cheeses, if they can listen to our whole podcast on cheeses. And there's lots of delicious cow milk cheeses in Piedmont that's also really special. It's the Grissini breadsticks. Obviously they're not grown, but that's native to Piedmont, the thin, delicious breadsticks. There's chocolate that's really special in Piedmont. We have to mention chocolate that dates back to 1560, the history of this region and city, to chocolate and to the Piedmont - the chocolate is called the gianduiotti. That's with the famous hazelnuts, of course, delicious. And there's vermouth. So again, not grown, but it's a product of the region, too.

Katy

I find it fascinating because these things that we're talking about now, like hazelnuts, truffles, rice could not be any more different to what you will find down south. And I'm sure, no doubt you can definitely get a pizza in Turin, but it's not really the typical dishes of the area, and people obviously have probably adapted. I've got to say, there's nothing quite like having a bit of shaved truffle on a pizza - just plain - you don't need any tomato sauce on that one. Just shaved truffle. So good. But yeah, I think this is absolutely brilliant about Italy because you can be - in 1 minute, you can be like even in Milan, the cuisine is quite different. And then you just go 1 hour on train and then you've got a completely different style of cooking and cuisine. It's brilliant. Now you learn a lot about the dishes, didn't you Liv? You had a special discovery that helped you learn about the dishes of the region. What was that?

Olivia

So, Andrea, my partner, Andrea - his nonna, was a very good cook. She's no longer with us now, and I didn't get to meet her. But we were cleaning out her over 100 year old house during the year and came across a really big discovery of all of her recipes. And you should have seen the folders and folders of handwritten recipes really in this beautiful handwriting can just imagine as well full of she was half Piemontese, half Ligurian. So it was a delightful discovery of Piemontese and Ligurian recipes that she had made and learned over the years. We even found different correspondence from her relatives in Liguria because she left Liguria to come and live in Piedmont when she met her husband. And different correspondence of exchanging these recipes, she was asking different relatives for their way of making focaccia, which is very famous in Liguria, and then some of her favorite Piemontese recipes, which the family love today, including the Pesche ripiene, which are their stuffed peaches only during summertime, because you have to remember, like, so reason is you can't find peaches all year round in Italy. So they're really special treat when they're really juicy and ripe in the summer, they're filled with amaretti biscuits. Maybe you can have a scoop of gelato with them after they baked in the oven. So that was a really special one, the hazelnut cake. And then, yeah, we'll get into talking about some more of the dishes, but it was a beautiful discovery. And I'm so happy to get to cook from these recipes with such a long history.

Katy

Yeah. Amazing. I think those connections that we have back to the past and seeing how people have adopted and adapted the recipes and passed them down from generation to generation. And it must feel like a privilege to be able to do that as well.

Olivia

Definitely.

Katy

Okay. Well, maybe- I thought maybe we could share with people. How do the meals work in Piedmont? So I think everyone maybe might have an idea initially that you have quite large meals. So we're going to take you through course by course of maybe a lunch or dinner. Do people usually prefer lunch or dinner in your region?

Olivia

It sort of depends. I think it's nice to have a big lunch in Italy because you can really go out with all the courses and then you've got time to digest going into the dinner. So yeah, probably we tend to have a bigger lunch, certainly on a weekend at least. And then your dinner is a little bit lighter, however, when in Italy you can do both if you're here. But yeah, there's traditionally a lot of courses and Piedmont is really big on the antipasti, so you can't feel like too much on the antipasti because you've got to remember you've got first course, second course, then you've got dessert. Maybe you've got digestives after that. I like to do a big lunch.

Katy

I don't know that I'll be able to restrain myself. I love antipasti. I just like the idea of just picking and trying a few little bit. But the other amazing thing about this cuisine is that it's always match with local wine. Liv and I are going to now talk through a typical menu that we'll have in the Piedmont, and we'll go and tell you not just about the dishes, but also about the wine that you would drink with it. All right. So tell us about this antipasti.

Olivia

They're so good. There's so many. But I've picked up a few of my favorites and the most typical classic from the region. So you might have heard me talk about this before, but I love it. And it's called Vitello tonnato. This is like the most sort of classic Piedmont that you can get. I think so, what is it? It's veal. It's cold, thinly sliced with a creamy sort of mayonnaise tuna sauce on top. Now I know that doesn't sound - it sounds a bit strange I guess. Maybe it doesn't sound the most enjoyable, but let me tell you, you have to try it, and after one bite, you'll be hooked. It is so good. It's so moreish and rich, and actually it's really refreshing during the warmer months here, especially on our tours in the spring one that will be going down very nicely. But you can find it on the menu in Piedmont always. It's so classic Piemontese. That's the first one.

Katy

Ok so just wait up a sec - because I want to ask a question. So antipasti is obviously appetizers or, as we say in Australia - nibbles. So how is it actually served when we say, like, veal slices? Is it served like a big plate or is it served on little bit of toast or how's it served?

Olivia

That's a good question. So it depends restaurant to restaurant, but the ones that I do generally, you get an individual plate, you'll have some bread on the side or the grissini, so the breadsticks that you can eat the Vitello tonnato with so you can choose to eat it by itself but you can also put it onto a slice of bread or wrap it around your grissini. Also, to mop up that mayonnaisy tuna sauce, you can dip it in as well. But then again, you can do sort of more buffet style or share plates. Share plates isn't - I know in Australia, definitely Melbourne, we've got a big dining culture of shared food or shared plates. And it's something I have to say that I have not noticed as a sort of concept in Piemonte at least it's not as much about sharing. Everyone likes to have their own plate. That's just what I've noticed here. My boyfriend's family is definitely like that, too. Everyone gets their own serve. So yeah, that's how the Vitello tonnato is enjoyed. Separate plates.

Katy

Well, I think that's probably the way of the world now?

Olivia

Yeah.

Katy

Not so many shared plates these days. Okay. So would you have, like, a little plate of that and then would that be it, or would you be trying a few different things?

Olivia

Well, I think you should try a few different things because as I said, the antipasti are just so good. So generally the antipasti are going to be a little bit smaller too. So it's not a huge. It's not a meal. So you can maybe go for one other if it's lunchtime and you've got the whole day to sort of digest. So if you did want to go for something else, I would definitely recommend trying the Battuta El Cotello, also known as Carne Cruda or the raw meat. So Piedmont is really famous for its beef for the fassona variety of cow. It's actually a really lean cut of meat. It's really tender, it's really juicy. And that means that it also feeds on delicious hay and grains in the countryside. It's actually lower in cholesterol. Anyway, all of that means that it's really good for eating raw. You can also have a cooked, but specifically, raw is delicious. So what this is al coltello basically means knife. It's cut by the knife. So it's not like a minced meat texture that maybe you'd be used to seeing in Australia or the US, but it's hand cut with a knife. So the actual texture, it's different to a minced meat texture. I guess if you can imagine really thinly, thinly, thinly sliced raw beef. And what they do with that is a bit of a sprinkle of salt, some oil, some lemon. The purists won't put lemon. They'll just say because the beef is so good, it hides the flavor. You just have oil. But generally I like to have a little squeeze of lemon on it. It's really delicious. And if you come in truffle time, especially on our fall tour, you can have it with shaved truffle over top. Now, let me tell you, if you think Carne

Cruda is good just with the oil and lemon, wait until you try it with truffle. It is out of this world - delicious.

Katy

I think I need to try that. That sounds amazing. And look, I think as well this meat for people that are worried, maybe about raw meat, it's like it's premium grade. It's kind of like the sushi of beef, right? You'd only use premium fish for sushi. So in this case, you're only using premium, premium beef. You probably don't need very much of it to enjoy it either. You probably just need a few bites. I'd say.

Olivia

Yeah, exactly. And that one is typically eaten by a lot of bread on the side. So people are normally putting scoop onto a slice of bread and enjoying it that way. It's really delicious.

Katy

Well, is there any other antipasti we should try, Liv?

Olivia

Yeah. So if you're maybe not as into the meat, I wanted to suggest a fish antipasta dish. Now you might be thinking, oh, but Piedmont is landlocked, so yes, we are, but we've got a really strong addition of anchovies in the cuisine. Anchovies are a big thing in Piedmont, and they're in a lot of dishes. So if you like anchovies, you're in luck. So there's a dish called Acciughe al verde. So that is essentially anchovies in a salsa verde or a green sauce. So with garlic and parsley, it's delicious. It's light, it's marinated. So they marinate in this sauce you eat that obviously with bread. Once again, you can have it by itself, too. But I think it's nice bit of bread or the grissini. Yeah. And it's just really delicious. And so the anchovies the reason why, if you're wondering why they are seeing in Piedmont, it all goes back to ancient trade routes into France and to Liguria. And I guess this is probably a recurrent theme and a lot of different old Italian stories - of salt. So salt was like very expensive. And to avoid paying taxes on salt, what the people used to do/what all the traders used to do was fill these big barrels of salt up with anchovies to hide how much salt they were carrying. So they didn't have to pay taxes. That's where they sort of started coming into Piemonte. And then over time, the anchovies themselves actually became like a really hot commodity and really popular with the locals.

Katy

Tax avoidance - it's the story about everything in the world. Sorry, tax minimisation should be saying.

Olivia

Yes.

Katy

What are we drinking with these delicious morsels Liv?

Olivia

Great question. So if you're a white wine drinker, obviously. Well, not obviously. But I need to say Piemonte is more famous for its red wines, of course. So get into that when we get to secondi, so Barola. But if you are a white wine drinker, we do also have white wines. So a delicious one to enjoy with the antipasti is the Arneis. So the Arneis is very easy, very drinkable. We're talking like lemon notes, bergamot, orange on the nose. So quite citrusy. So it's delicious. It's light and easy and it's really perfect for antipasti. So I'd go for that. If you're not a white wine drinker, you could do a red and just go for like a really easy red. So something really typical of Piemonte is a Barbera or Grignolino. So there are two sort of lighter reds, the Barbera was considered, and I guess probably still is considered like a farmer's red wine. So it was always on the table. You just have a glass with every meal. It's just easy and drinkable.

Katy

I think I could just happily sort of graze around those few dishes and those wines for a while. But it's being Italy. We need to move on to the primi courses.

Olivia

Primi is my favorite. So generally speaking, if you're going out to a restaurant, you don't have to do like a Primi and Secondi. You can choose. And I always go for a Primi because that means pasta generally, which I love. So the classic pasta, one of the classic pastas from this region is called Tajarin , or that's the dialect word in Italian, it's Tagliolini, but in Piemonte we call it Tajarin, and it's an egg pasta, so it's very rich. It's got lots of egg yolks in it actually more egg or more egg yolks in it than other pastas in Italy. So it's a very yellow (or orange, depending on the color eggs) dough. And yes, you can have that. It's very thinly cut. The sauces that you have it with can vary, so you can have it with just like a classic meat ragu. You could have it with just butter. And again, if you come during white truffle season on the Fall tour, we'll definitely be enjoying that with the freshly shaved white truffles on top and some egg yolk mixed through into the sauce. And it's as good as it sounds, maybe even better.

Katy

I mean, how do they do that with maybe four or five ingredients? It's just crazy. Something that tastes so delicious and they can just elevate it up to something that's, like ambrosial.

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Olivia

It's so good. So that's one pasta. If you're looking for another pasta, we do have another. And this one is a little bit more, I guess, complicated to make just because it takes a little bit longer. But Agnolotti or agnolotti plin, again, is dialect, again Piemonte has a dialect, but it means pinched. And that refers to the way that exactly that they roll and sort of doing their hand motions here. But you can't see me, but the way that they fold over the Agnolotti, so it's like if you know what a raviolo is or ravioli. It's sort of like that. So it's a stuffed pasta. It looks different because of the way that they fold it. They sort of pinch it, I guess, pinch the edges and roll the dough over itself so that's filled with generally it's filled with a meat, a roast meat filling and the sauces. You make the filling first with this delicious roast beef, you might add some vegetables in, like a spinach, is a really popular one to add in. But the great thing is, nothing is wasted. The sauce, that delicious meat sauce that the meat has been simmering away in. They use that for the sauce to coat the pasta. And it's so delicious. Roast beef sauce.

Katy

Very hearty. So you can climb all the mountains there and get the energy.

Olivia

Indeed. And then obviously, during white truffle season, of course, you also have that with butter and shaved truffles over the top. Once again. It's very decadent, but it is so delicious and you have to try it.

Katy

Well, I mean, I feel like my life wouldn't be complete unless I tried it, quite frankly. But anyway, now do we need to order another bottle of wine for this course, or can we stick with the ones we had before.

Olivia

Well, you could stick if you've gone for the red so the Barbera or the Grignolino. You could stick with that if you're enjoying it. But if you wanted to change things up, it's not every day you're in Piemonte, maybe we try something else. So another classic grape is Dolcetto and that's red wine. It's a little bit more, I guess, sophisticated. Or the next level up from a Barbera . We're not talking Barolo yet, but it is maybe a little bit more complex that I'm looking for. A little bit more structure, a bit more tannin. Again, very easy drinking and delicious.

Katy

The thing is as well. These aren't huge serves, are they? Because it's very rich. So if you can imagine, is it maybe like a fist or maybe more than a fist of pasta? So it's not like sometimes

when we hear we have spag bol or Australians like to truncate everything spaghetti bolognese, you get a huge bowl of pasta. It's not like that. I used to freak out a bit when I thought of the pastas and having all these dishes. But what it is, it's a very small amount, but it's like packed full of flavor. You have got flavor bombs going everywhere, and you probably wouldn't want to eat much more than that because it's going to overwhelm you and your digestive system. So you just have this beautiful taste, just the right amount to keep you going.

Olivia

It's so true. And another thing that I have noticed a difference, I guess, compared to Australia and the US with Italy, is that there's a bigger emphasis actually on the pasta itself, other than the sauce a lot of the time. A great example I was just thinking of recently when we went to a little town in Le Langhe called Neive, which is one of the Borghi più belli d'Italia - so the most beautiful villages in Italy. (but that's another story) we ordered the agnolotti del plin, and the way it was served was very different to how I just described. But it was literally in a napkin, a very fancy napkin. I'm talking a fabric napkin here, not the serviettes. Yeah. And so there was no actual sauce, just a very light coating of butter. Butter is another product that is very Piemontese. And yeah, it was just a few little agnolotti in a napkin - the emphasis was completely on appreciating the pasta itself and not a big course because you've ordered a second dish or maybe you've had a couple of antipasti, so you don't want to fill up too much on that. And it's just appreciating how delicious the feeling of the pasta is and the actual dough of the pasta. That's a perfect example for what you're just talking about, Katy.

Katy

And I really think it's fascinating because people think there might be maybe one way to make pasta, but if you go down to Puglia, I mean, they don't really even use eggs, do they? It's more of a water and flour based pasta, whereas as you head north, the cuisine gets richer and more dense with eggs and butter. So if you like that kind of thing. Who doesn't? So we have a little break. They don't rush you. It's piano, piano and taking everything slowly as we eat in Italy but eventually we will get onto Secondi. What are these main courses and what can we try when we're in Piemonte?

Olivia

There's so much I've narrowed it down to two interesting ones to talk about. The first one is called Brasato al Barolo. So that is essentially braised veal in a bottle of Barolo wine, so very decadent, very rich. You can imagine the meat falling off the bone, that sort of consistency just melts in your mouth, very tender. It's been slow cooked and, of course, paired with the most famous wine, one of the most famous wines in Italy, and definitely the most famous in Piedmont. So, yeah, it's so delicious. I really love it. It's more-ish, and it's just comforting. It's really delicious.

Katy

And would you get that all year round, or is it something that you can generally find in one particular season?

Olivia

It's more typical in the cooler season, depending on where you go. You might find it during summer, but you probably want to order something a little bit lighter in the summer season because it's very heavy and it just pairs itself perfectly for fall, I would say and winter.

Katy

I can just see, like just a roaring fire. A little osteria/trattoria - just tucking into that. Sounds amazing. Oh, goodness me. What other things can we try Liv?

Olivia

Another really, really typical one. And again, this is I'm talking fall and winter here for this, so definitely for our Fall itinerary is Bagna Cauda. And this means hot sauce. Or actually the direct translation would be hot bath and it's cooked. It's sort of like if you imagine fondue. So if you imagine that little pot that they have fondue in it's not with cheese, though. It is with ton of garlic and anchovies. So it's very heavy. It's very delicious, very more-ish. Everyone at the table needs to eat it, because after you eat it, obviously you're going to be smelling like garlic for a while. So you all need to indulge in it. But don't worry, everyone else in Piemonte is eating it. So you'll all be in the same boat. That's fine. And you can dip in vegetables into that. You can dip pieces of bread into the hot sauce. Now I've put it in the Secondi section. But really, if you're ordering Bagna Cauda, you'd probably just get that and not a Primi, just because it's quite filling, and it's just really more-ish, like you've got little pieces of vegetables and bread and you're sort of dipping it in. It is really delicious. And it's so Piemontese that you will not find Bagna Cauda in any other region. I mean, that goes for literally everything. I've been talking about to be honest with you, you're not going to find Brasato al Barolo or any other region either. But especially Bagna Cauda. It is so Piemontese the most Piemontese you can get.

Katy

Maybe when you're younger, like the taste of anchovies and garlic is something that might be a little bit aquired, but as you get older, so I guess your palate becomes a little bit more sophisticated, that sort of flavor bomb and that combination of taste is really in the umami. What is it? The sixth sense - this concentration of flavor is just amazing. And especially - it does sound like there's a lot of meat. So if you're going to go and have some vegetables and what sort of vegetables would go in.

Olivia

You can do, like some carrot, maybe zucchini or capsicums or peppers or Peperone in Italy, as they're called, they're a really big part of the Piemontese cuisine as well. And they always feature an antipasti. It's another one that we can talk about another time. But what they do with the Bagna Cauda is they roast the peppers and they serve the sauce directly on top of that. So that's why you don't have to have everyone dipping into the same pot as well. And it's really delicious. And as you said, completely vegetarian, too.

Katy

This is what is so interesting about Italian cuisine is I think a lot of people think it's very meat heavy, which it can be. Obviously, we've talked about a few meat dishes here, but you can also get a lot of vegetarian dishes and a lot of beautiful vegetable dishes. So if anyone's vegetarian and concerned about joining the tours or traveling in Italy at all, you can absolutely be vegetarian, really, because there's so many different options. .

Olivia

Yeah And I've only just spoken about a few dishes from the region. There are so many others, and vegetables are a big part as well. There's a big - especially in the antipasti area - there's a big tradition of marinated and pickled vegetables we haven't even spoken about. There's different salads, one called Insalata Russa. But again, that's another podcast. There's so much to talk about.

Katy

It was funny. I said, Liv, what should we talk about? She sent me a list of about - I don't know - I reckon it was about 40 dishes. This could be going on for a while - maybe we should split it up. This is the beauty of it, right. And these dishes that Liv has basically dedicated herself to over the last couple of years are 100% Piemontese, and you're not going to get them anywhere else. So if you're wanting to truly connect with a place and understand all about it, you've got to go check out its food and its wine. And there's really no better place to do that than Piemonte.

Olivia

100% - food and wine heaven here.

Katy

Yeah. Obviously the Secondi - obviously this is where the Barolo comes out. And Barolo. And the tradition of Barolo is such an important part of the culture. There in Piemonte, you've got some beautiful towns that are in the heart of the region and which we would definitely visit if you join us on our tour.

Olivia

Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely. The town of Barolo itself is gorgeous. It's really tiny, and there's some surrounding towns that also produce that delicious wine. So it comes from the Nebbiolo grape. So that's definitely what I'd be pairing for the Secondi, the Nebbiolo. So there's high tannin, it's structured. It's a full bodied wine. It's really sophisticated. It's aged. The Barolo has to be aged for a number of years before it's able to be sold. And it's delicious. And we'll definitely be enjoying it in Barolo itself and in La Langhuele on our tours in Fall and in Spring.

Katy

Yeah. I mean, like these villages, this beautiful wine and these dishes come from, they're ridiculously good looking, straight out of a postcard and a fairytale surrounded by vines and stone walls and spires. You know how I feel about Lago Orta, which is like my favorite Lake, which is in Piemonte, and I love it, but we digress a little bit, but yeah, definitely. It's one of those places which for some reason it's really flying under the radar. I don't quite know why, because it's a logical place to go through if you're coming from France through to Italy. But people definitely need to dip their toes in here, I think. But before we sort of leave this meal, you cannot finish an Italian meal just by leaving it on a glass of red wine and some meat. What's happening next Liv?

Olivia

So we're having dessert. Of course, we are on holiday, we're in Piemonte and there's lots of delicious desserts. But I've narrowed it down to talk about some of the most typical. The first one is similar to custard, but it's not custard because it's milk free and it's Zabaglione, so it's very Piemontese. It's made with egg yolks, sugar and a sweet wine. And the way that you'd eat that you can have it poured over either hazelnut cake, which is another really popular dessert in Piemonte. Or sometimes it's even served in little cups. And so you can dip biscuits in different traditional biscuits that you can enjoy it with. It's really delicious. And it's a really great one if you're like me and you're lactose intolerant because there's no milk in it. So you can enjoy that. And it's sort of like custard, but it's way better than custard. It's so good.

Katy

I think it's a bit like eggnog.

Olivia

Yeah. It's a bit like eggnog. Exactly. Piemontese eggnog.

Katy

Yeah. It's so good.

Olivia

It's so good. Yeah. And sometimes they even put in a little splash of cognac in there. It's really yummy. If you don't want that, though, there's plenty of other people Piemontese desserts and I wanted to talk about one of the most Piemontese, again, is Bunet, or like a chocolate flan. So if you like chocolate, we're talking about how chocolate is famous in this region. Then Bunet is for you. It's really delicious. And it's got like a caramel sauce on top. It's so good and it's cold. It's a really good one in any season. But yeah, even in the summer season because it's cold. So it's a little refreshing.

Katy

Chocolate and caramel hey?

Olivia

Match made in heaven!

Katy

Will we be having a little something with that when we eat our dolci?

Olivia

I think so. What we paired that with is a Moscato di Asti. So Asti is a town in Piemont in the region, and they're famous for producing this sweet sparkling wine, the Moscato. And now, if you've had maybe not the best experiences with Moscato in the past, it tends to be like quite a mass produced wine, definitely in Australia and I'm sure in the US - you haven't maybe tried the OCG Moscato di Asti that we will be enjoying with our dessert. So forget, maybe if you've had bad experiences with it in the past, because if you get the good one, it is delicious, goes perfectly with dessert, and it's a really nice sort of invigorating way, perhaps, to end the meal on a high with those bubbles.

Katy

Oh, my goodness. That does sound divine. So all these dishes, the whole thing sounds wonderful. And I just love the fact that you can taste your way around Italy - course, by course, bite by bite. If we're in Piemonte, do we find all of these dishes at the one restaurant, or do you have to sort of know which restaurant is the best one for particular dishes?

Olivia

It depends. There's definitely certain restaurants that I would recommend for certain things that I've spoken about. So there's a restaurant in Turin that specializes in Vitello tonnato and so it's like if you really want to enjoy the top top top Vitello tonnato, maybe just that's the focus of your meal, then you'd go there. But yeah, you can find a lot of these dishes at most

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Piemontese restaurants. You do need to sort of be able to work out the good ones from perhaps the more touristy ones, obviously - so you're getting the absolute best version of the dish. But yeah, I guess we should say that, for example, you're going to be more likely to find the things that I've spoken about on the menu of a restaurant here than you would a carbonara, which is not from Piemonte, for example.

Katy

Yeah. Exactly what I really love about you Liv. Is Livy is like a super adventurous eater. She will try anything. Try any type of offal, she'll go for it and she'll try it, and at least you'll have a go. So that's what I love about you. Even if you don't like it. That's fine. Remember, she did try a very, very strong cheese in Puglia, which most people wouldn't go anywhere near. But I think it's really great that you've got that experience and you can read the mood and you can say, well, okay - some of these people gave a try type of food because there are definitely some more adventurous. Then you can also point people into the direction of things that maybe if you're not so adventurous, you could try and still get that taste of the region that we're really looking for.

Olivia

Definitely. Yeah. Exactly. As I said, this is just a small glimpse into some of the dishes in Piemonte. There's vegetarian dishes, there's dishes maybe with not as much anchovy or garlic. There's something really for everyone in this region, for sure.

Katy

Are there any memorable places that you've had some of these dishes? They are obviously iconic dishes of the region. And the people of Pierremont are very proud of them. But have you ever had an experience where you're just like, oh, my gosh, I am so in Piedmont here. I've got the view. I've got the dish.

Olivia

So many. There's a really special restaurant in Le Langhe, and we will be going to it on our tour because it's just so picturesque and just such a good representation. I think, of this country-style Piemontese cuisine. I've been there quite a number of times and I've been there in all seasons, too. So I've been there in the summertime where you sit outdoors, literally under the vines and that's beautiful. And you have sort of the more some of the lighter dishes. And then I've been there before in truffle season, where you sit inside and it's really cozy in the trattoria, and they're grating over the truffles (at your table, by the way, like you're watching this whole experience unfold. Nothing happens behind the scenes and there's truffles involved). And that's super special. So I definitely recommend that. And then there are quite a number of restaurants in Turin that I adore, and you can have really different experiences. There's another one that's in Turin that it takes some of the traditional dishes that I've spoken about, and it presents its own take on them. So a little bit more modern, a

little bit of a modern twist, but based on the traditional recipes and they've got an amazing, amazing wine list, a lot of focus on more natural organic wines which is something I'm really into. And so, yeah, that's a really special experience, too, because, for example, when you order the Agnolotti that was spoken about, so you get the Agnolotti that was spoken about, but for the sauce, they've turned into like a foam. So it's the same roast beef sauce, but the way that they present it is their sort of modern take on it and it's in the form of a foam, and it's really cool. It's really delicious. So there's lots of different experiences you can have in the region.

Katy

I cannot wait now, listeners, this has been just a little nibble, I would say. And there's just obviously there's so much to try. And I hope you can hear Liv's passion for this region cuisine because she definitely has just embraced her new home and tried to find out as much as she can about the cuisine. And I just can't think of a better person to take you on a journey of discovery around this beautiful part of Italy. But we need to tell everyone Liv is not only an amazing host for the Untold Italy Piedmont tours and some of our other tours too, actually, but she's also a very talented woman who loves sharing her passion for her adopted country far and wide. And so Liv, how can people follow the project you're working on, including nonna's cookbooks.

Olivia

So if you'd like to follow me, I'm pretty active on Instagram. So my Instagram is Livguine. So that is L-I-V (which is my nickname) G-U-I-N-E. So it's Liv and linguine, the pasta put together - that's how we created that. And then I've got the website, which is the same - my blog is the same name livguine.com. And I've just started a newsletter as well - so it's filled with different recipes, different announcements like the tours, different projects I'm working on, I guess - I don't give too much away. But if you want to keep up to date, that's a really good one to sign up too as well.

Katy

And Liv does amazing live tours with people from all over Italy, that is really worthwhile catching - so you can just get a glimpse and a little taste test of all the different parts of Italy that you sort of want to glimpse into. So she does that on Instagram - on Instagram account @livguine. Liv! Thank you for taking us on this virtual culinary journey of beautiful Piedmont. I can't wait to join you in Turin one day soon and taste all of these dishes for myself with you and, of course, have a beautiful glass of Barolo. Thanks for joining us on Untold Italy today.

Olivia

Grazie mille Katy. Hope to see you all in Piedmont in the near future.

Katy

Oh my goodness, I always get hungry recording these food episodes. Especially when we talk about pasta and truffles. This is a very simple dish - in terms of ingredients - but it packs so much flavor. The almost smokiness of the truffle pairs so beautifully with the rich egg pasta. If you've never tried truffles before you're definitely in for a treat. And why not try the very best truffles in the world in Piedmont?

I just love the diversity of food in Italy. There's nothing more fun, in my opinion, than comparing the foods of the different regions as, while they do have some similarities, each place puts its own spin on dishes based on what's locally available and delicious. Like truffles

Now if you're among the lucky small group of 14 people joining Olivia on tour in Piedmont, you'll be sure to try the very best versions of the local dishes, with of course amazing matching wines. And what's even more special is that you won't just be going to a restaurant to try the dishes but you'll be meeting the truffle hunters and wine makers, learning how to make some of the dishes yourself and hearing very personal stories about what those dishes mean to their families. All the while you'll be gazing out at some of the most picturesque hills in all of Italy and let me tell you, you're going to get a lot of "wows" when you share photos with your family and friends.

I really love this 5 day tour because not only does it give you a lovely taste of Piedmont, but it can easily be slotted into a northern Italian itinerary as the starting point in Turin is just one hour by train from Milan. So in 2 weeks you could visit Venice, Milan and perhaps the lakes and take a culinary detour to Piedmont for a completely different experience and perspective. And of course you'll be in the company of Olivia who speaks Italian and has all the local contacts you could dream of.

If you'd like to know more about the Untold Italy tours to Piedmont in Spring and Fall or autumn you can head to tours.untolditaly.com where you'll find a detailed day by day itinerary so you know what to expect. We've included pretty much everything in the tour cost in terms of meals, wine and experiences so there are no extra costs to budget for. You just need to relax and enjoy the ride, be wined and dined and ready to fall in love with Piedmont

Of course, if you want the names of the dishes Olivia mentioned so you can seek them out on your northern Italian adventure go to untolditaly.com/105 for episode 105 and you'll find them all there

I'm going to wrap this episode up now with a little teaser of where we are headed to next week. It's on the coast and not far from Piedmont. It's one of my favorite regions and our guest is a local who has some wonderful secrets to share. But until then - ciao for now