

Untold Italy Episode 114 - Welcome to Emilia Romagna

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 114.

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 friends! I hope you've had a great week so far and are ready to dip your toes into a new Italian region. Here at Untold Italy we love to bring you the people, stories, and places in Italy that you may have a little inkling of but don't know enough about them yet to include them in your itinerary.

And trust me, Italy has enough places to cover to last a lifetime of podcast episodes. Hooray!

This week we're headed to Italy's Emilia Romagna region - a central Italian region between Florence and Venice where they make some of the country's best-loved food products and dishes.

Do you love Parmigiano Reggiano and Ragu Bolognese? Well, this is where these iconic foods are found in Italy. Remember, Italian food is a term people outside Italy have made up to include the vast number of dishes and foodstuffs found from region to region.

So if you want to try THE BEST Parmigiano Reggiano then best head to Emilia Romagna where it is made to an exacting recipe and standard by locals who have done this for generations. This precision planning is also seen in the prestige cars that are made in this region - Ferrari, Lamborghini, and also Ducati motorcycles.

But Emilia Romagna is so much more than food and cars - there are castles, UNESCO sites with glittering Byzantine mosaics, incredible festivals, and a gorgeous coastline and you're going to learn all about them today.

Joining me today is local guide Giulia Tamarri who runs tours in and around her region and runs the website <https://travelwithrezdora.com/> Giulia is fiercely passionate about her region and its incredible bounty and she says her star sign is "tortellini" ...

Katy

Benvenuta Giulia. Welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

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Giulia

Grazie. Katy, I'm very, very happy to be here on your podcast.

Katy

I'm so excited. It's wonderful to have you here to tell us all about your home region, Emilia Romagna but before we delve into discovering this region that is just so full of amazing surprises, most English tourists don't really visit, except for maybe Bologna. Let's hear all about you, though. What's your story?

Giulia

Yes. So it's actually funny, Katy, because I like to say that my star sign is Tortellini, because actually I was born in this town called Castelfranco Emilia, which is exactly in the middle of Modena, and Bologna, which is, according to a legend, the birthplace of Tortellini. And I now live in another small town called Spilamberto, which is famous for traditional balsamic vinegar. As you can tell already, it's all about food in my region.

Giulia

My region is not on the list of places to see. Maybe on your first travel to Italy, but definitely it should be, at least on your second travel. So, first of all, welcome to my region, Emilia Romagna. Two names, because my region has mainly two main souls. We have Emilia, which is inland and which is where I live. And then we have Romagna, which is the part which borders the sea. The name, though, the real name, comes from a Roman Consul. Have you heard of Via Aemilia?

Katy

Yes.

Giulia

So Via Aemilia is actually the Roman road that was built by Marcus Lepidus in 187 BC, and it's actually the road that still remains untouched and he built it to connect the Southeast of my region. Exactly the city of Rimini to the northwest, which is the city of Piacenza. In Emilia Romagna, we have eleven cities, and nine of these cities, including mine, are on the Via Aemilia. So definitely, if you come and visit my region, you will actually drive it. The only two cities that are not on Via Aemilia are connected to other access, so they are easily accessible.

Katy

Now, Giulia, did you grow up loving food?

Giulia

Absolutely. Yes, of course, you cannot not be a foodie if you're from a region, my reason. We have 44 IGP and PDO products. Imagine we have the Italy record for listed products in my region. So if you were born here, you have to be a foodie.

Katy

Right? And so for our listeners who don't know what those are, they are products that are made to a specific recipe using specific ingredients, and they're very special and local to each region. So it's a very unique and special theme to have so many of these products in the region.

Katy

Now, Giulia, so when you were born with the tortellini in your mouth, where did life take you after that?

Giulia

So I decided to study at the University of Bologna. As you know, it's one of the oldest universities all over the world. After that, I decided actually to work in Australia. I worked as an English teacher. Yes. Which seems quite funny. But yes, I actually became an English teacher to foreign students. And that really changed my whole perspective. So I really enjoyed meeting international people. And now I can still do this because I am a tour director. So since 2015, I lead tours to Italy and to Europe. And after COVID, I have founded my own website because I run my own food tours in my region.

Katy

Congratulations. Yes, it's a beautiful site. And of course, as you mentioned, food is so important in your region. So let's go back and explore Emilia Romagna, because we have this beautiful road going through it, the Via Aemilia. And we have the amazing towns. Most of us know Bologna. And then some of us may know Moderna and Parma. But you said there are eleven cities.

Giulia

Yes, we have eleven cities and hundreds of beautiful medieval towns with castles, fortresses. We have national parks, Pilgrim trails, amusement park. I mean, we have got it all. I am not big headed by saying that because we have a very, very diverse territory. So first of all, Katy, do you know where Emilia Romagna is? Because maybe not everyone knows.

Katy

Yeah. I think you need to explain where it is. I think it's good because a bit of geography always helps us get orientated.

Giulia

So I would like to compare Italy as a woman. Okay, so let's say the head are the Northern regions and then the necklace. If you think of the center as the main body and the south as the legs we have the necklace. That's where my region is, Emilia Romagna so it literally almost takes over the whole of Italy, we border with the Tuscany. And as I said, eleven cities, all of them have got a UNESCO heritage site, for example, Parma. It has been nominated the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. Then we have Ravenna with the early Christian and Byzantine mosaics, we have Ferrara, the city of the Renaissance. We have Reggio, where the Italian flag was born. We have Cesena, which has got the only example in the world of humanistic library. We have Faenza with the ceramics, very old tradition of ceramics. Then we have Rimini, Rimini with, for example, the Roman remains and also the city of Fellini, the creator of La Dolce Vita. And you can have La Dolce Vita here.

Katy

Absolutely. Well, that's a really popular seaside resort, isn't it, for Europeans? Rimini. And I know a lot of people. I've got some Dutch friends and they go every year to Rimini or just outside Rimini because there's some beautiful, beautiful beaches down there, too, isn't it?

Giulia

Absolutely. Yeah. It's what we call the 365 days of fun. Like Rimini is also very well known for the beaches and for the nightlife and also for amusement parks, in case you are traveling with your family.

Katy

Good to know. Good to know. So how did sort of Emilia Romagna come about? So you're there between Tuscany and is it to the south there's Umbria as well. And to the North, Lombardi. So you're in the middle there, and you're on the up at the top of the neck. And it's really hard to overstate how important this region is to the food culture of Italy, because some of the most important foods of Italian cuisine come from Emilia Romagna. But what is going through there is there a big river that goes through your region that gives you so much water and gives you so much beautiful pastures.

Giulia

Actually, exactly. Katy, as you mentioned, we have all this beautiful basket of regional products because of the territory that we have, which is very diverse. We have plains, we've got hills, we've got the Apennine mountains, we've got the sea, and we have got the river Po, which is the longest in Italy. So it means that all these different territories can accommodate for different types of food. So even like thinking about the climate. One funny thing is that when I was a child, I didn't really like to the fog. There is the area close to the Po river, for

example, close to Ferrara. It's always foggy. And then as I grew up, I realized that fog is so important because without it, we can't have Culatello, for example. So there is a special microclimate that needs fog. And you can't have amazing Culatello without it.

Katy

Can you tell everyone what Culatello is? I know what it is, but I don't think everyone knows what Culatello is. It's delicious.

Giulia

Sorry to be a bit cheeky, but think of your bottom. Now touch your bottom and pretend you've got a pocket. That's the part of the Culatello. Okay. Culatello is the fatest, the richest part of the pig. Sorry, I gave for granted. You see, this is the mind of an Emilia Romagna person for granted that whenever you talk about food, most of the time, you think of pork. Okay. So pig for us is really important for our culture. Think Katy, that I live next to a town which has a pig statue in the middle of the square. So sorry. I take for granted that I'm talking about pork meat, and it's a cured meat. And there aren't many producers of Culatello. Only around ten. And you can eat it in the area of Parma and Piacenza. That's where it comes from. Close to the Po river.

Katy

Goodness me. And only ten people produce it. This is what I love about Italy you can actually go and you have to go to the place because otherwise you're not going to have that experience. It's really important. So you can literally go to so many different towns and have a little micro, different experience wherever you go. Amazing. But maybe we should talk about as well, the other most famous ingredients that we have from your region, which everyone knows well, we start with the big one. The cheese.

Giulia

The King of all cheeses. Well, of course, you can find Parmigiano Reggiano everywhere in Italy also as well. Right? But it can only be produced here in my region and there is a very strict disciplinary that tells you the borders, for example, Bologna, only one side of Bologna can produce it. If it's on the other side of the river, it cannot be called Parmigiano Reggiano. So very important and Parmigiano Reggiano - that's an experience that I suggest that you should visit a dairy farm because it's so interesting to see how we make it. We make it every day with fresh milk from the day and half of the milk, half of the component of the milk from the previous night. It has to mature, age for at least twelve months, which is a very long time. But this is the least. It can age longer than that. Normally the preferred ages of Parmigiano Reggiano are 24 or 36 months. But the important thing about it is that the disciplinary is so strict that we have a third party that goes to the dairy farm with a hammer. He goes and check with this hammer. It can detect from the hammer if he can feel that there is air

bubbles, he says no. So boom, that wheel of cheese cannot be called Parmigiano Reggiano and cannot have the stamp.

Katy

And it's really distinctive stamp and they're very distinctive rounds of cheese, if anyone's ever seen them. They're these huge yellow rounds, aren't they, with a special mark of the region on the cheese. And so now I'm wondering, Giulia, what happens to the rejected cheese?

Giulia

Yes, well, of course, it takes so long, so we don't obviously waste it. So it cannot be called Parmigiano Reggiano cheese and it cannot have the seal, as I said, but it still can be sold by the farm at a lower price. So it would really be a shame not to use it because in my region we have too many products, but we don't want to waste any of it. It's really important. For example, even the crust of Parmesano, we cook with that as well.

Katy

Delicious in soups. Yum.

Giulia

Yes, exactly, Katie. So your broth to make your risotto, we keep all our crusts. I mean, it's so unique and so wonderful. Even the crusts cannot be wasted.

Katy

I know. I think when my husband's making pasta, what we do - is the kids here's the wedge of cheese out and then we always come up and everyone's taking a little slice of cheese every time, just cheeky taking a bit of cheese every time before even we have the pasta. I love Parmigiano Reggiano. And the more aged the better for me. So that's the King of Cheeses. And then you mentioned that you come from a very small village that's famous for another very famous product.

Giulia

Yes. For example, for me, another King, which is the Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena. So I must specify that in my region we've got two balsamic vinegar. We've got the one called Aceto Balsamico and then we've got the one Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale. I point this out because there is a huge difference. And you know which one I'm very passionate about already. This Tradizionale takes a minimum of twelve years. And for Extravecchio, extra old - it's minimum 25 years.

Katy

Exactly. Now, the thing is, we all were probably introduced to balsamic vinegar by - probably in the 90s, people started squirting balsamic vinegar sauces over salads and things in Australia and in the US. And I think it's kind of like lost what it's all about. So, can you tell everyone what exactly is balsamic vinegar and why it's special and what the process is to make it?

Giulia

Well, it's actually one ingredient. Cooked grape must. So in October, we take the grape must, we boil it and we put it in our what we call batteria So it's a set of barrels. Each barrel is made of a different wood. So each passage, every year we take from the big barrels through the smallest barrel. So we have at least five sets. And every year we add the newly cooked must to the biggest bottle, which is the youngest. And we continue like this until it reaches twelve years.

Katy

Amazing. And it tastes so delicious. So grape must is actually the leftovers of grapes that have been squashed for wine, right?

Giulia

Correct. Yes.

Katy

I love this not wasting anything. It's so fantastic. And it makes such a delicious product afterwards. It's just so far beyond what you get on these salads that we sometimes get that they put balsamic on. Like it's not really anything to do with that. It's such a rich and delicious and thick sort of syrupy texture, really, isn't it? It's not like a runny sauce. It's very rich and it's absolutely delicious. And my small son often asks for a spoonful of it just because.

Giulia

We call it actually the black gold of Modena. Yeah. And the good thing, I think it's interesting to know that we call it balsamico from the word balm. Still, nowadays we use it to cure ourselves. So for a balm. So whenever we have sore throat, we have a teaspoon of Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale. So this is one reason, but also for us, it's special because most families in the area of Modena where Balsamico Tradizionale is produced, most families have a batteria - so a set of these barrels at home. So we actually make it. And it's normally a gift that we give as a dowry. Normally, newborn babies get a set of barrels and get there.

Katy

I would love my own barrel. Oh, my goodness. What do you eat it with? So what do you pair it with?

Giulia

Well, it's a very versatile product. So, for example, as you mentioned, you can add it on salad, on Parmigiano Reggiano, it's fantastic. Normally, what I recommend is you could have a plate with different aging of Parmigiano Reggiano, and then you can taste each aging with Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale to really brings out even more the flavor of Parmigiano Reggiano, but also it can be used as a finishing touch on, for example, even dessert, even on gelato. I love it with gelato, Katy.

Katy

Yes. Delicious. Oh, my goodness. Yeah. I think everyone, once you've tried the Tradizionale, you will just go, what is this bottle that I have in my kitchen? You'll say, I don't want that anymore. I want this one. And you can go and visit the places where they produce them, can't you?

Giulia

Absolutely. So I totally recommend both the visit of the Museum, but also the visit a family Acetaia. So you can actually compare because it's like with wine, each family, each Acetaia has got a personality. And each Acetaia might, for example, use different woods in their barrels. As I said, each wood gives a special taste to it. So it's nice to compare and do a tasting.

Katy

And where would you recommend that we do that?

Giulia

If you wanted to see the process? I would recommend visiting my area early October because we have the Fiesta Mosto Cotto, in the middle of the square, we have these huge containers, and you see the old man stirring the must, because that's what's required every year to actually add to the barrels. It's very, very interesting. And I mentioned older generations, but even younger generations are very interested in.

Katy

Yeah. And it's really hard to overestimate how passionate the people of your region are about food and maintaining the food culture. I think it's amazing. And one of the main protagonists of that, probably the most famous, actually, is Massimo Bottura, who owns one of the world's best restaurants. And it's in Modena, Osteria Francescana. And he's made a really amazing movement that is all about sharing food and making sure there's no food waste. And I really love this part of your culture that is continuing in the traditions of that. It's really fascinating. And it's not just making these incredible products, but it's also sharing them with people, no matter where they come from in life.

Giulia

Absolutely. Yes. We like to call each other the land of slow food. Absolutely. Slow food, but also fast cars.

Katy

Yes. Tell us about those, because Modena is like the hub of food and fast cars.

Giulia

We haven't mentioned the car industry and factories. So we have, of course, the very well known Ferrari, but also Lamborghini. Then we have the motorcycles, we have Ducati, we have Zonda. That's another car producer. So a land of contrast, slow food, fast cars. But also what I would recommend after the slow food that most of the time it's so great that you hardly can have small portions. Then you should keep fit and you should do also the sports side of it. So hike - we have many opportunities for hiking, for bicycling, lots of different things you can find in my region.

Katy

So let's talk about those cars a little bit. So they're mainly concentrated around Modena, around them. So you can go and visit under the Ferrari factory, and you can also visit the Lamborghini factory and is it easy to organize or do you really need a tour to do that?

Giulia

Well, I don't think that it's hard to organize, but obviously if you want to have a stress free time there, you could also book a tour. Each car factory runs actually tours, so you can easily find those connecting to their website.

Katy

Okay.

Giulia

What is more difficult probably is to discover the small family run places. So that's what, for example, you would need probably more help with.

Katy

Yeah, for sure. And when you're in your region, do you need a car to get around or are the towns and villages well connected by public transport?

Giulia

Well, I must say that Bologna has got, as you know, an international airport and it's on the main route for our bullet train - Freccia Rossa or Italo Treno. So they run to Bologna very easily. I mean, pretty much every hour you've got a train that connects north to the south of Italy passing through Bologna. But in order to really explore the off the beaten track places, I would recommend renting a car. It's not difficult to drive at all. Maybe what is a little bit more difficult is to drive in the city center because city centers are normally for the locals, for residents. So you can drive just before city center, find a parking, and then you public transportation to explore the city.

Katy

Oh, that's a good tip. Bologna, I think it's a wonderful city. It's a University city because you went to University there, didn't you? And I think any city that's got a really strong University culture is always fascinating. It's always got a really good vibe about it. And Bologna is really no different. And it's got lots of little quirky, little secrets. Hasn't it's even got a canal?

Giulia

Yes, there is a little tiny door from where you can see the canal that still runs underground of Bologna. So in the past, Bologna would have been, for example, like Venice, like full of canals. It was a very important city for the trade of silk. And there was this network of canals to navigate to actually bring the goods from Bologna to other places. Unfortunately, the canals have been covered. But there are a few spots in the city, including this little window that is like one of the secrets of Bologna, it is that Katy - from which you can actually see water passing by. It's really pretty.

Katy

Yeah. It's cute, isn't it? And I think Bologna has got its own little quirks. Every each Italian city is different, but they've got the portichi and the beautiful towers in Bologna as well.

Giulia

I'm happy that you mentioned Portichi in Bologna. Yes. And because very recently they have now been listed as part of UNESCO Heritage. So we have 60 km of Porticoes. We call Bologna, the city where you don't need an umbrella because literally you walk and you are covered. And this Porticis are the set of our social life. That's where we meet when we go to Bologna, we normally meet. 'Sotto Portici' under the portici, and you can see in the city you've got the oldest one, so more medieval to more Renaissance or baroque style. So I definitely recommend, if you come to Bologna, to actually walk it. Walk under the porticoes, check them out. And you should also, if you are brave enough, you should actually walk up to the sanctuary of San Luca - that are connected to the city with the portico and the shape of these porticoes, if you saw it from above, from the sky are shaped as a snake.

Katy

Oh, I didn't know that. Is that sanctuary? Is that the one that's next to the train station?

Giulia

It's not really next, but it's not far. Bologna is a very livable city. Nowhere you go it's hard. It's going to be far. The idea is it has got 666 colonades because it's the number of the devil. So the path it has got a religious meaning. So it's the path that you should walk in order to get free of your sins.

Katy

Probably need to do that.

Giulia

Trust me, the view from there is absolutely stunning. So you see Bologna, you see the Appennines. It's really pretty. So you should definitely dedicate half a day for that walk.

Katy

Okay, Giulia, noted. Excellent. I mean, I have been to Bologna, but I have to say, I did go there to eat. I ate a lot of tortellini and it was absolutely amazing. And one of the really great things I did, I did a food tour and I saw the ladies making this pasta, and it was unbelievable how quickly they can make those little pasta parcels. It was just really blew my mind. They work so fast, don't they?

Giulia

I honestly respect them so much. I even call myself rezdora because my aim is to become great as they are. So rezdora is this term that comes from the Latin *regerēs*, to direct, because these women not only are good cook, but they are like the bosses of the managers of the house. Okay. So you see them still 95 years old making pasta every day. I mean, they are amazing and they are so quick because if you look at them doing it, you think, oh, I might do it. And then when you try with your rolling team making it, it's really hard. It requires a lot of practice. Yeah.

Katy

And I totally respect that people take the time to learn because I think I don't know. And I'm guilty of this as much as anyone. We don't make the time to sit and master something anymore. You actually have to spend hours and hours and hours doing that. And it shows. It really shows. So I encourage anyone, if you're in Bologna, do a food tour and make sure it includes these ladies making pastas or anywhere in your region, actually. So. All right. We've heard about Bologna.

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Giulia

Yes.

Katy

And it's portici and the beautiful view and the towers. It's beautiful. It's a beautiful city, and it's all in red. I love it. And we've heard about Modena, which has got the fast cars and the delicious food and all of that. It's got a beautiful market there, too, hasn't it?

Giulia

Yeah. This is where I normally take my clients. Always. You should really go to Mercatello Binelli. It's a covered market, an ancient market, actually beautiful. The product is where you mingle with us. That's where we go to buy the best Parmigiano Reggiano, the best Mortadella, the best parma ham, all the good ingredients that we use at home. It's really a beautiful experience.

Katy

I can't wait to go there. So we also heard about Rimini, which is famous for beaches and Fellini and super fun times. And what about Ravenna? Ravenna is a beautiful place that is maybe a little harder to get to, but it's worth a detour, right?

Giulia

Absolutely. Well, if you are a lover of art and mosaics, Ravenna will blow your mind. Literally. If you are familiar with Byzantine art, you should really go there. Gold plated mosaics, really colorful, really detailed. And there are actually different churches that you can visit. So definitely a day trip to Ravenna is also very much recommended.

Katy

It's also UNESCO listed, right. And I think they're centuries and centuries old. I mean, how they've survived is just quite amazing. And anyone who is interested in that type of home definitely needs to go there. So these are some of the biggest cities, right? So what about some of the little villages and towns? Because we all like to discover all these beautiful, cute places. And in Italy, you call them Borghi più belli d'Italia. We just call them cute and we like them. And do you have some favorites?

Giulia

Well, I do have many favorites, so it's kind of hard for me to pick a few. First of all, apart from my cute little town around me, so Spilamberto, famous for Balsamico Tradizionale, Vignola famous for cherries, Castelvetro famous for Lambrusco wine. I would totally also recommend visiting Brisighella, which is in Romagna, on the way between Emilia to Romagna. Brisighella is listed as Borghi d'Italia. It has got the donkey way. People there use donkeys as a

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means of transportation - in order to transport the olives as well. It's famous for olive. Olive oil. In Brisighella, they've got amazing olive trees. And that's another experience that you should try. Go and try the olive oil of Emilia Romagna, which also is not maybe the most well known place for but definitely go there to taste it. Another town that I am in love with is Langirano, which is the area of Prosciutto di Parma. Literally, when you go to Langirano and you drive, you start smelling Prosciutto di Parma. It's like everywhere.

Katy

Okay.

Giulia

It's very funny because even the road is called Via de Prosciutto. And in Langirano, apart from having all the amazing Prosciutto di Parma producers, you can explore the Castello di Torrechiara. And it's a very romantic place. I totally recommend it. It's one of the most beautiful castles you will ever see. It's actually where they filmed. Do you remember the movie Lady Oak?

Katy

No, I don't know that one.

Giulia

But yes, you should visit. It's really pretty. And around there they produce amazing wines as well. So lots of beautiful vineyards around that area too. So you could do prosciutto, you could do also wine tasting and admire a beautiful castle.

Katy

Wow. It's interesting you mentioned wine because you did mention Lambrusco before. And Lambrusco, I don't know - in Australia it has a certain reputation. I always have to say that's one of the first glasses of wine that I drank when I was very young, and I've since learnt that it probably doesn't travel that well, especially not to Australia. It's a very long way. But it's a very young wine, isn't it? And it needs to be drunk very quickly. I heard.

Giulia

Okay. So unfortunately, as you mentioned, it doesn't have a great reputation, Lambrusco. But I must say, things have very much changed lately. I mean, we have very good producers of very high quality Lambrusco. So as you know, it's a sparkling wine. It used to be produced very badly in the past, but now the production is very much controlled. There are producers that really look after Lambrusco and they want to recuperate very old vines that used to make Lambrusco. So it's not like a cheap wine at all. Definitely. And it's very great with our food, so

it's fantastic with our cured meats, with our cheeses. I totally recommend it. It's actually really good.

Katy

Yeah, it's a real shame actually, isn't it, that something gets that reputation. And I think we didn't understand what - people brought the wine to Australia and maybe to the United States, and they didn't really understand that it was made to be drunk while you're eating this food. And the food is very rich and it's got a lot of fat and flavor in it. And so the wine is balanced to those flavors. Right. So if you're just pouring out the Lambrusco, it's not how it's supposed to be consumed. You're really supposed to be having your glasses Lambrusco with your beautiful pasta and your rich cheese and balsamic. I think these are the things that we need to understand a bit more about Italian cuisine, to really understand it better. And there's no better way to do that than going traveling through these gorgeous regions and learning for ourselves.

Giulia

Absolutely. I would say that we never drink wine to get drunk. We really drink the wine for that particular food, to have the experience.

Katy

Wow. I mean, if you're a foodie, there's no better place. You can just go from town to town. You can try the Prosciutto, you could try the Parmigiano, you can try all the different things and then you can go for a hike, which does sound like a very good idea, actually. I think it's very important. After all of that food. What's your favorite, favorite place in your region?

Giulia

Well, close to my area there is a beautiful National Park called Parco dei Sassi di Roccamalatina. It's a very hard name. That's where I normally go on my weekend. I love hiking so I go there because the scenery is very beautiful. There are these strangely formed rocks. You should really have a look at the pictures of these rocks. They really resemble to the area of Meteora in Greece, if you ever been very peculiar. So that's a place that is not very well known, that is still untouched. It's not on the tourist trail. And after a hike, of course, you should go for Tigelle and Gnoccho Frito. So try also the typical mountain cuisine that's another day you can spend in my area that I recommend.

Katy

Wow, there's so many places you can go. It's just very diverse. I think that's what's really interesting to me is you've got all the beaches and you've got the Renaissance towns and you've got the castles. I just find it fascinating that people don't know so much about this region. I find it really interesting and I'm really glad we're talking about it today. Now, is there

a special time of year that we can visit? Is there like you mentioned in the Harvest, it's a really nice time to see how they're making the balsamico.

Giulia

Absolutely. But I would also say September, October because there are lots of food festivals. Every little town is linked to a special product. We want to show how much we are proud of it, so you can attend one of our festivals. But also another good time would be Spring time, I would say, and especially in my area, I would say the cherry blossom season. So you should really visit Vignola and see the beautiful cherry blossom and eat the cherries that are amazing. Greater cherries especially. It's a very tiny little cherry that unfortunately many producers stopped cultivating it because it's small and it's very sensitive. So it was hard to transport these cherries elsewhere. So they prefer to grow other types of cherries that would be easier for them to travel. Whereas the small cherries, the Moretta cherries are the sweetest, the most amazing explosion in your mouth. You should come and try the Moretta cherry. So blossom season, which means end of May, early June, fantastic.

Katy

It's really interesting, isn't it? I think in Japan people go to the cherry blossom - there's like people book for years in advance to go to their cherry blossom festival. But we've got a nice cute little one here in Emilia Romagna where people can go to. I love it. And what about I like what when you talk about food festivals and the Sagre, do you have a favorite Sagre that happens in your area?

Giulia

You know, I have to say my town, the Castelfranco Emilia festival of San Micola. So in September, 2nd week of September for a full week, we have tortellini festival and you see the rezdore making the tortellini just in front of you. And you can have the most amazing tortellini plate you will ever try. And it's really traditional and local. Okay. For a whole week you can participate. And it culminates on the Sunday where we have a parade where the most important people of my town dressed up in medieval costumes. And there is like this cute scene where the Oste gives the rolling pin to the new Oste of the year. What do I mean by that? I should explain the legend of the tortellino. So basically, we believe that it's always about love. Okay? So there is always a beautiful lady involved and it's always about passion. This beautiful lady was traveling to Bologna on her horse. But she stopped in Castelfranco Emilia, my town, for the night. And when she entered this inn, the host - when he saw her, he immediately fell in love with her. And what he did, he gave her the key to her room and he went to spy her through the keyhole and imagined all he could see was her belly button. He went back to the kitchen and thinking of her beautiful belly button, he created tortellini to honor her.

Katy

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I love it. I always used to call the belly buttons. But now I know it's true. It comes from the legend.

Giulia

They have to be tiny, very tiny. So another thing. Tiny and Sfoglia. The dough, the Sfoglia has to be thin. Also, it has to be not completely smooth. Okay. Because the completely smooth is done by a machine. No, no, no, no -you can't accept that it has to be done with the rolling pin. Because if the pasta is a little bit porous, it's better for the sauce to stick to the tortellino. So normally tortellino are in broth, actually. But in general, when you think about pasta with the Mattarello - it has to be with that consistency. So, for example, that's another typical product of my region with Ragu sauce. So the Ragu sticks to the pasta better.

Katy

There's a lot of science and trial and error behind making these pastas. And it's not what we think. It's a lot of love and effort put into them. And maybe people don't know what's inside the tortellini. Do you want to tell them?

Giulia

The thing is, everyone has got his or her own recipes. So it's very hard. Okay. There is a recipe that has been registered in Bologna by a Consorzio. But once again, if you ask any rezdora, they will give you a different recipe. Okay? So the ingredients will be the same, but not exactly the amount. So it's a mixture of Mortadella, of beef, of Parmigiano Reggiano, of nutmeg, all mixed together. But everyone has the best amount. Okay? So you know, you will never find the same.

Katy

Do you have a favorite place to eat it. Apart from your mums?

Giulia

Eat my mum's. Yes. I can't say okay. It's my mums.

Katy

But if you went out, would you ever order it when you go out or is that not allowed?

Giulia

No. The thing is normally I eat tortellini at my home, but also I love them so much that I would definitely eat them out as well. There are loads of restaurants where they make amazing tortellini. I must say my very favorite are the ones from Pappa Gallo in the city center of Bologna that are really fantastic.

Katy

Okay, duly noted, everyone Pappa Gallo and Bologna.

Giulia

These are like some of my favorites. Obviously, I've got other names, but I would say those would be my favorite, the very, very, very best.

Katy

I mean, I could talk about tortellini for a month, but let's go back to your festival. So they hand over the - we got a bit diverted. There was the ceremony where they hand over is it the rolling pin?

Giulia

Because every year we have someone like an important person that plays the role of the host and an important person, a woman that role plays the beautiful lady. La contessa. So every year they pass the rolling pin from the old to the new host. So every year it's like passing by the rolling pin.

Katy

My goodness, this is exciting. I hope you can be the contessa. That would be very exciting. So a whole week in September dedicated to tortellini. Who knew? Amazing. Well, Giulia, I love how this conversation about Emilia Romagna, it always comes back to food. You can start talking about mosaics, but then somehow we always come back to the food of the region, and it's definitely the heart and soul of Emilia Romagna. Now I know that I speak to all of us to say that we want to know more. So how can our listeners stay in touch with you?

Giulia

Well, you can find me on my website, which is www.travelwithrezdora.com. That difficult word I mentioned before? It's R-E-Z-D-O-R-A. This is the figure, the managing figure of the house, not only the good cook. You can find me also on my Instagram account and on my Facebook, and I'm waiting to welcome you to my beautiful region.

Katy

Excellent. Well, we're going to put all your details up into the show notes so everyone can find you. But I love this Rezdora. I mean, it's unique to your region, isn't it? And it's just a special word. I know when I first met Giulia, she was explaining how important that word is to her in that term, so that's why she's chosen to use it in her brand. So Grazie Mille. Thank you so much for joining us on Untold Italy today, Giulia, and opening our eyes to the wonders of

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Emilia Romagna. I'm sure everyone can't wait to learn more about your region, and I can't wait to be there in June.

Giulia

Grazie Mille. And I can't wait to meet you all.

Katy

So my food and wine-loving listeners, and those of you who love art and architecture, pretty towns and coastal breezes, don't you think you should spend some time in Emilia Romagna? Once again, it's quite baffling why more people don't visit and spend time there.

Bologna is a great city that can act as a central hub for your trip as well as explore the region full of amazing sights and experiences. You can take the fast speed train to easily reach Florence in 40 minutes, Milan in an hour Venice in just over an hour and a half and Rome in 2 hours. It really is so easy. Modena is in easy reach too if you've got some fast car loving travel companions

We're spending a good chunk of time in and around Modena on our upcoming trip and I can't wait to explore. I'm really hoping we catch the end of the cherry blossom season as my daughter would love it. I promise to post many many pictures on our Instagram as well as our adventures discovering balsamico, Parmigiano Reggiano and prosciutto di parma.

If you plan to spend time in beautiful Emilia Romagna make sure you check in with Giulia via her website <https://travelwithrezdora.com/> or on Instagram. Of course, all her details including the places she mentioned are on our website at untolditaly.com/114

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. That's all for today. Next time we're learning about one of my all-time favorite Italian pastimes - aperitivo!!

But until then it's "ciao for now"