

# Untold Italy Episode 116 - Extend your Italy trip budget with these travel hacks

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 115.

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 everyone, how are you all doing? Did you enjoy our little aperitivo break last week? I sure did. It's making me very excited to get to Italy and enjoy many long summer nights in the piazza.

This week we're going to approach a topic that I am probably not the best placed to advise on so I invited along someone who is! My gorgeous friend Corinna Cooke is back to give you some excellent advice on how to stretch your Italy trip budget further.

And let's face it, due to several factors happening in the world currently prices are on the rise both at home and in Italy, so if we can save a few dollars here and there we'll have more in our wallets for all the fun things like aperitivo or that perfect pair of Italian made shoes.

So let's get started and find out exactly how we can save money before and during our trip to Italy so we don't come home with a financial headache.

## Katy

Benvenuta Corinna, welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast.

## Corinna

Hi, Katy. Thanks for having me back. I'm so excited to be here.

## Katy

Hooray. It's so good to have you back. I just love our chats about planning trips to Italy because you give so many me amazing, amazing tips. But before we get started on today's chat, what have you been up to lately?

## Corinna

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So my entire life has been consumed in the proof reading of the new book. And actually today, just a couple of hours ago, the book went to the editor. So now it's in this whole new process, but it has literally taken up every waking minute for a couple of months now. So it's exciting and nerve wracking and all those things.

**Katy**

And this is book number

**Corinna**

Four.

**Katy**

Wow. And Corinna obviously writes the Glam Italia series of travel guides to Italy. And we're always thrilled to have her on the show here because she's so generous about sharing her knowledge and her books are fabulous. So, Corinna, in other exciting news, you're heading back to Italy very soon, too, aren't you?

**Corinna**

Yeah. I'm about to head back over in just a few weeks, actually. So I've been backwards and forwards. I'll be backwards and forwards quite a bit this year, which is always fun because whenever I get on the plane to come home, I'm always sobbing and counting down to when I go back and planning the next trip. And that's kind of my existence. I'm always in this - if I'm not in Italy, I'm in my planning for Italy mode and figuring out what corners I can cut. How can I make this happen?

**Katy**

I don't know what's more exciting. I mean, I think definitely being there is exciting, but I do love the planning phase, too. Okay. So today I thought we'd talk about some ways that we can stretch our budget for Italy further. And for lots of reasons prices are creeping up for things like flights and transport etc and it's eating into our budget. So we're going to talk about that. But we're also hopefully going to give some people some inspiration if they're thinking maybe they can't afford to go to Italy or maybe the thought of an international trip is just too much of an expense. So today let's share some tips on how we can stretch that budget, how we can make those trips happen and everyone's dreams come true. Do you think we can do that?

**Corinna**

We can. So for those of you listening, this is my superpower. I don't have many skills like I'm no good at running or hurdling or anything. My superpower is how to do an absolutely banging trip on a shoestring. On next to no money. And I've done it for years. I was a single mum for most of my son's life and was still able to go to Italy every year. But it was on a budget that

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was so tight it squeaked when you walk, but still we did it. And there's all these tricks that you can do. And whether you're somebody who thinks you don't have the budget to travel, this is going to be really helpful to you because it's going to show you how I actually do it, and I do it all the time. And if you're somebody that does have the budget to travel, you can look at these ways to save enormous amounts of money so you can buy more Prada handbags or whatever you want to do. But I do this all the time. I fly for free. I probably get a free international flight, whether I'm going to New Zealand or whether I'm going to Italy, probably every twelve to 18 months, I do the whole thing for \$0 on the flights.

### Corinna

So right there we're going to be talking about how to save multi thousands on flights. When I'm going for myself for my personal trips, I'm going to wipe out the cost of my train tickets, maybe Airbnb costs entrance to different things. It's really brilliant. And what I do, it's what travel influencers do. And people who are professionally doing trips around the world all the time. And you're wondering how on Earth do they afford it? They do this kind of stuff. So all that slipping into it, it's something that everybody can do, and you don't have to be wealthy to do it.

### Katy

The major expense, I think, for everyone is flights, isn't it?

### Corinna

Yeah. We've got two real biggest expenses, our flights and our accommodation. So what we're going to do is get a little bit of strategy going here and see how we get it for free. So the first thing we want to do is we want to get a credit card that is a travel card, okay. And we want it to be a non airline travel card. So as we're going to be accruing miles, if you are accruing miles, say on an American Airlines Visa card, American Airlines has all the power in this relationship. So they can say, well, we're going to blackout Christmas and we're going to blackout Thanksgiving and we're going to blackout Easter. And, oh, this spell of summer is too expensive for us to have non revenue seats going, so we're blacking that out, too. And they can make it so that you have to do horrific flight paths and long layovers and all kinds of horrible things in order to accrue that free seat. So rather than getting a mileage card with an airline, we want to get a mileage card that is a travel card. So here in America there's things like the Chase Sapphire card, Citibank has a card, Capital One has their Venture card. There's a whole lot of cards that are specifically for travel. And you can go on a website called [ThePointsguy.com](http://ThePointsguy.com), and he lists all the cards and breaks them down with what their signing bonus is and what their fee is and all the rest of it. Then what we're going to do is we're going to use that card as though it's a debit card. So the card that I use does a standard 2 miles for every dollar I spend, whatever I spend it on. So every single expense in my life, I route through this card, I pay all my bills on it. I wish I could pay my mortgage on it and I haven't been able to figure out that. But everything else, from my cell phone to my electricity bill, to my water bill, every single expense, if I'm going to get a cup of coffee, it's

going through that card. If I'm going to buy a T shirt, which I just did, it goes through that card. And you don't realize quite how much you're spending. How much it accrues and so quickly because if you're getting 2 miles for every dollar, you might be sitting there going, well, yeah, but how am I going to get X number of thousand miles? It adds up faster than you know it. So I do that and then I never run a balance on it. So every couple of days I'm just paying that thing back off. So all I've done is added one extra step in my process. Most of these cards, most of the travel cards will give a really good signing bonus. So it might be that you get 50,000 miles when you sign up or 60,000 miles or last year they were doing 100,000. But I think that was like a one time thing. But 60,000 miles is the signing bonus is really good. I do cards that have like a \$95 a year fee because normally you'll get the first year free, and then after that you're going to pay an annual fee. It's not worth it to me to have some fancy card that has a \$400 a year fee, that's kind of stupid. But for me, a card that has a \$95 fee, which is kind of standard, is worth it. I'm going to make that money back a thousand times over. And when there are travel cards, they will often just credit you back things like, I just renewed my global entry, which is \$100. I'd run it through my travel card. So I was getting 200 points for it because I run everything through there. And then they messaged me and said, oh, hey, we see that you just renewed your global entry. We're wiping that fee and it was gone. I got the miles and it's a travel card so they can look at things like passport renewals. And right there that was \$100 back into my travel spending money.

## Katy

I just wanted to say, for those of you who aren't in the United States, the Points Guy is a very well known website in the United States for doing all that analysis. But there is also sites in Australia, in UK, Canada as well and what we'll do is pop them all into the show notes for you because it is definitely a strategy that a lot of people use. And I know people traveling business class to Europe this summer. And yeah, it's exciting for them. They're not terribly wealthy people, but they've managed to use this strategy to have a great time.

## Corinna

Absolutely. So then the next trick is that you use it for absolutely everything. Part of your strategy. So every time you're paying for anything, you're running it through this card and you just stay on top of it so that it doesn't get away from you. And then once it becomes habit, you know, you're pumping gas in your car, you're buying a train ticket you're doing or whatever. It's all running through there, and it just becomes like balancing your checkbook in the old days. The next thing is separately, you're going to choose an airline that is the airline that you fly, set up a mileage program with them. So for me, I run all of my miles through American Airlines. And then what I do is when I'm buying flights to anywhere, I'm going to buy flights that are either on American Airlines or on one of their code share partners. So it might be that American Airlines is going to be far too expensive to do a given trip that I want to do. But Finnish Airlines might go like Los Angeles, Helsinki, Rome, and it might be really cost effective. And those miles are linked. So what we do with this program is we're getting two kinds of miles. We're getting miles with the airline, and separately, we're getting miles with a

nonairline credit card. So we've got two streams of mileage happening. So the nonairline credit card that we're running our entire life through, that thing racks up miles like nobody's business. And then what you do is when you want to buy an airline ticket, for example, you go and you find the airline, you want the ticket, you want the flight path you want -everything you want. You charge it to your nonairline credit card and you're going to get double miles on it. But when it comes to pay for it, if you have enough miles in there, you hit the redeem miles button and it'll bring up all of your travel expenses and you can just zero them out. So that's one of the ways that I get. So I get a free flight about every twelve to 18 months, even during COVID when there was no traveling. So I wasn't accruing miles by going on planes, I was accruing miles by running my life through the card. But what it will do when you hit the redeem miles button is it's going to populate all of your travel expenses so you can zero out your train tickets. So maybe in Italy you're flying into Venice and you're going to have some days there, and then you're going to take a high speed train down to Florence and have some days there and then you're going to take a high speed train down to Rome and maybe you're going to go to Naples. So all of those charges, you're putting them on your credit card as you're buying them. Now, when we go, we hit the redeem button, they're all going to pop up and you look at them. So maybe you don't have enough miles to cover your flight yet, but you start zeroing out your train tickets. Now, on those train trips I just told you about, depending on when you buy your tickets, which we're going to get into in a bit, you can be running, say, €60 per leg of that. So we just talked about Venice to Florence, leg number one, Florence to Rome, Rome to Naples. That's €180. If you can zero that out for doing nothing, you just hit the redeem button and cancel it. Well, that's \$180 more spending money. You have €180 more spending money. And you can do that with your accommodation. You can zero out hotel bills. You can zero out Airbnb bills. So last year, the week after covid opened and we got to travel again, I whipped over to Italy for I think I was out there for two weeks in June of last year and I did it for almost free. So one of my friends went with me and we split the cost of the rental car. We split the cost of our Airbnb. And then I had tickets in and out of some museums and I had my own train tickets and hers. And what I was able to do was do this huge trip. It was a massive trip. And I want to say it cost me something like \$400 because everything else zeroed out from my mileage card.

**Katy**

Wow. So how does it know which is travel expenses?

**Corinna**

It knows how to recognize hotels. It knows how to recognize Airbnbs and knows how to recognize train tickets and tickets to the Colosseum and things like that. The credit card companies, they're putting everything into buckets. They're putting into buckets what these different expenses are that you're doing in life. So what it does is it just populates all of your travel expenses. So if you don't have enough miles accrued for a free flight, you can still be knocking out these other things. And if you have 50,000 miles, signing bonus for a non airline credit card, depending on where you're staying, can be five or six nights of accommodation.

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So when you look at it that way, that's a lot. And it's like places that I stay. Like I stay in Arezzo, which I'm beside myself for about, Arezzo, I love it. But 50,000 miles, my goodness, I can kill over a week's worth of accommodation in Arezzo with that. So when you look at it, it's a huge chunk of money that you are able to save. And for a lot of people, that can be the difference between going and not going.

**Katy**

Absolutely.

**Corinna**

Now the next thing I want to talk about in this same game because we've got two things going here. We've got our non airline credit card that we're running our mileage program on. And it has to be a travel card. It has to be one that is designed for this. So regular non airline travel credit card doesn't do it. But also when you're over there, these non airline travel credit cards have no international fees. So you can swipe your heart out and be earning more miles and you're not paying an international fee. But now back into our other bucket that we talked about. We have an airline that we've chosen, in my case, American Airlines. Wherever possible, fly American or one of their code share partners so that my miles are staying with my American miles. But the next cool thing is you use shopping portals. So American Airlines has just come online with their shopping portal. I use one called EV Rewards, which is E like egg V, like Victor rewards. And what these portals do is you set up your account and you're going to choose your mileage program. So I'll click down American Airlines miles and plug that in. And now everything that I buy through that portal is accruing me more miles on my airline miles. For example, I just bought two days ago, I bought two J. Crew white T shirts for an upcoming trip that I have. And instead of going on my regular Google or Safari and typing in Jcrew.com and going there, I go into my portal that Ev Rewards portal. And in there I type J. Crew up at pops, I buy my same two T shirts and they were \$18 a piece. And I got 2 miles that went to my American Airlines miles per dollar. So that was like 36 and 36. We got 72 miles just slid over into my airline one but I paid for it with my travel card, so I also got 72 miles. Went over to my other one. And you think, well, 72 miles is neither here nor there. And now it's not. But over the course of a year, the course of just life, this stuff adds up like crazy if you have a big expense coming up. Like last year I had to get a new laptop, right? And I've been putting it off and putting it off and we weren't at crisis where the laptop died and now I have to replace it, it was like, yeah, I've got to get with the program and update my laptop. So what I did, I knew which laptop I wanted to get. And now I'm watching the portals and some of them, like the one the EV reward one will email you every day and I'll scan it . If there's nothing I'm needing to shop for right now, I don't even bother opening it. But I was thinking I'd be really good if someone does a good deal on laptops. And as it so happened, one of the portals popped up. It was like three months after I decided I needed a new laptop. Popped up a deal where for a month (it was like a back to school kind of thing ) they were going to do seven times the miles for anything from Apple. Well, I needed an Apple MacBook Pro that was just under \$2,000, which I ran through my travel credit card and got 4000 miles

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in that bucket. But through EV Reward, putting it through my airline miles, I got 14,000 airline miles.

**Katy**

Amazing.

**Corinna**

Yeah. So anytime you have a decent sized purchase that you have to make, sniff around the portals first and see if you can turn that into some more miles because it adds up. So we go back to that trip I told you about from last June, where I zeroed out most of my train tickets and a substantial portion of my share of the Airbnb costs. I flew round trip for \$79. And the reason I was able to go Phoenix, Dallas, Rome, Dallas, Phoenix on a Dreamliner. I wasn't on some crappy airline that's got duct tape holding the wings together. This is the Dreamliner, which is a really nice plane to fly, like state of the art plane on a brilliant flight path. Like everything was brilliant. I did that round trip for \$79 and what that was was all this portal stuff that I use and all the things in the background just accruing away on my American Airlines had gotten up to the point where I had enough for a free flight. So those airline miles, they take longer to accrue. But if you're just constantly building away at them and thinking every three, four years I'll get a free flight, well, the retail on my flight was \$1,430 and I know that because my friend Jennifer was flying with me and that's what she had to pay for her portion. So that's how you can really accumulate an enormous amount of miles and get really significant portions of your trip for free. Which means if you're somebody who - I don't think your listeners know, but almost all of my child's life, I was a single mom and money was so tight, it was unbelievable. And things are really, really difficult. But I still managed to go to Italy almost every year for about 2010 on. And it was from doing this. And it wasn't that I had money to burn on going on trips to Italy. It's just I had strategy to get stuff for free.

**Katy**

I love it. It just shows this is patience, organization and persistence. This is key and critical to this strategy, I think, because I think as well, what I love about this is that you're not compromising on comfort.

**Corinna**

God no! No disrespect to people who go camping and stuff, but so not my thing. I want to stay in nice places and I want to have a nice experience yeah.

**Katy**

Because there are some other strategies that you can use to save money on flights. For example, you can be very flexible in terms of when you fly your flight, how long the flights take. I mean, here from Australia, at the moment, a good flight time is 22 hours. But if you

want to save some money, you can drag that out to 28 hours. I'm sorry, but that's not for me. But if you're traveling on a budget and if you've got a really strict budget, then you can actually save quite a bit of money by being flexible on that particular part of your trip. Yeah.

**Corinna**

Because then you paid for it when you arrive. If you've got a flight path that maybe it saves you a few hundred dollars, but you're leaving at the crack of dawn and you've got long layovers and it's taking you forever to get there. Then your first couple of days you'd actually lost because you're just so travel fatigued, you want to be able to do the easiest flight path possible so that your recovery time is as quick as possible.

**Katy**

Yeah.

**Corinna**

And there's even more things that you can do so that you're converting miles to somewhere else and you're going business class.

**Katy**

If you combine like a few strategies you can get really I mean, like, if you're 25 and you're full of energy and you only need 2 hours sleep a day, then I think having those longer flights and multiple legs on the flights is probably a doer. But as we're getting a little bit, we've got a few more years under the belt. The other thing I like to do is set up a flight alerts on Google and sky scanner, because then you're seeing where price drops are and you can also see what days are cheaper to fly. So if you've got some flexibility around that, you can also check in, I think, depending on your airport. So a lot of people say Tuesday is a cheaper day to fly. Well, I think it really depends where you're departing from.

**Corinna**

Depends on the airport. I do a lot of strategy, too, where if you live in Los Angeles and you're flying in and out of LAX, it is vastly less expensive than if you live in Phoenix. So I used to save on average, about \$400 round trip by taking a \$59 flight down to LAX and then actually starting my international booking from there. So rather than booking flights that were Phoenix to Rome, I'd book flights that were Los Angeles to Rome. And that saved a lot of money, too. I have another one for you.

**Katy**

Keep them coming. What have you got?

**Corinna**

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So the next one is if you're staying in, I call all vacation rentals Airbnb. If I'm blowing my nose, it's a Kleenex. No matter who's making that tissue, if I'm shipping something, I'm FedExing it, regardless of which company it's with. So when I'm talking about Airbnb, I'm talking about that type of accommodation. So if that's the type of accommodation that you're doing, you're doing a vacation rental. You can save money by going to fewer rentals, stay longer and destination. Every time you check out, you have a cleaning fee and most of the country it's going to be around €50. So sometimes it's more, sometimes it's a bit less. But in general, if you factor into your budget that the cleaning fee portion of your accommodation is going to be €50. So if you keep changing places and going from one to the next to the next, you're racking up all of these €50. So you can if you're on a budget and you want to condense things a little bit. So you've got a twelve day trip instead of moving every three days, move every four days or block a chunk, stay in Florence and do all kinds of things from there or in Tuscany wherever. And you do all of your day trips and all the rest of it, and then make a move to one other place. You're still going to have an amazing trip, but you're going to save several rounds of those cleaning fees on your Airbnb.

**Katy**

Not to mention the transit fees like getting to and from train stations and getting around to different places.

**Corinna**

Yeah, there's different things like that that you can really again, it's small, increments €50 at a time. But if you were me, the single mom in 2011, 2012 and everything - that €50, which was about \$70 that had to come from somewhere, if I could shave that off, that actually made a difference to my bottom line. So that's another one. The next one is - whatever accommodation you're doing, go one neighborhood back from the action. So for example, instead of staying in the historic center of Rome, go one neighborhood back and be in Testaccio, be in Ostiense or even within Trastevere, if you're in the heart of the action, it's more expensive than if you're just a few blocks back and all of it is still walking distance. But you've changed your \$179 a night, one bedroom to a \$101 a night or to a \$98 a night. And again, it really all adds up.

**Katy**

That's the difference between having the accommodation and a nice dinner and just having the accommodation.

**Corinna**

Yes. And also I go over this all the time in all of my books, so people who've read my books will be like, "oh, will she ever shut up". But the mass tourism goes to the heart of town. Okay. So if you are staying in a hotel or an Airbnb that's close to the Vatican or close to the Colosseum or close to the Duomo in Florence or whatever it is right in there, then that's

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where you're going to have the most tourists. But also the simple pleasures of life in Italy. The things that I love the most are coming out of my stepping out of my door, walking down the street and stopping for coffee, or walking down the street to have dinner, walking down the street to sit outside and having aperitivo - those things when they're inside the historic center, right where all the action is. That's where you're paying \$4/5 for a cappuccino versus go back a neighborhood, just get away from where the mass tourism is. And now it's \$1.20 for a cappuccino. Big difference that applies, like with eating out, too. If you are eating out one neighborhood back and you're avoiding the tourist areas and you're avoiding tourist restaurants, the cost of your meal and the quality of your meal is just so much better. You're in a mom and pop shop that's full of Italians, and your bowl of pasta just cost you €10. Instead of being in the heart of - up by the Pantheon and that same bowl of, say, carbonara is €18. Or the wine at the little local place is €2/3. Whereas in the heart of town, why on Earth would they make it cheap when they can make it hugely expensive? One of my places that I love going, I go all the time in Trastevere, in Rome, it's a place where it's always packed. There's always a line down the street full of locals, which is about the best sign you can get that the food is going to be good. But a pizza. So pizza in Italy, for those of you who haven't been, you get an individual pizza per person. And in Rome, pizza it's very thin crust - it's like Rome makes the best pizza. Don't tell the Naples. So at Carlo Menta, a personal pizza, I get a margherita with arugula on top. That is €4. And then a half jug of their house wine, which is two glasses, is another €4. So you've got your food, you've got your drink. You've got all this fantastic atmosphere with all these excited Italians all around you, and you haven't even spent \$10. It's the greatest thing ever.

### Katy

My goodness. That's actually a really good tip about the carafe, actually. When you're ordering your wine, you don't actually have to order a full bottle. You can actually order a half bottle.

### Corinna

The house wine is amazing, too. All over Italy, wherever you go. The house wine is fantastic. So I had one group not too long ago where they were wine people like, this is what they do. They belong to wine clubs. They're swirling every glass. They're sniffing everything and talking about the bouquets and everything. We were a couple of days in and I was like, look, I've been to this restaurant before, try the house wine. And they were like, shocked and like, oh, my God, Philistine - she wants to drink house wine. And I'm like trust me, if you don't like it, I'll drink it and you buy your 30 Euro old bottles. They were blown away. They wound up going house wine everywhere for the whole rest of the trip. And it was a really long trip and they were like messaging their friends, going, look at this jug of wine that cost us €4. And it's so good. Another way you can really win with these really great little house wines that they have.

### Katy

Yeah. And obviously the house wine is a local wine, so it matches the food perfectly as well.

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## Corinna

I always say to the waiter, because I always want to eat food from this place that I'm at. So when I'm in Rome, I don't want Venetian food. When I'm in Venice, I don't want Roman food, I want the food from the town that I'm in. What is your cuisine? And then I'll say the way, okay, now what wine should I have with that? Because you always want a wine that's from the same place as the food is from. And half the time they're like, oh, I have the house wine, it's so good. Otherwise it's like I bring you the house wine, you don't like it, I bring you something else, it's all good. And then it's like every time it's a banger, it's just fantastic.

## Katy

You also mentioned Testaccio in Rome, which I think is just an amazing place to go to eat. And like you said, there's some really great, just small restaurants there and little wine bars etc, where you can just go and try the local food. I just love that area. And I went there on a food tour and this is a little tip - I mean, food tours can be a little bit expensive or people might think that. They can be about €79/80 depending on what people do. But let me tell you, you have a food tour for lunch, you probably won't eat till lunch the next day, so you've saved the meals in the middle

## Corinna

Also, here's another piece of strategy. Say one of the things you have on your list for your Italy trip is that you want to do a foodie walking tour. Depending on where in the country you're doing it, that price differential changes enormously. For example, and we only ever use the fully licensed private tour guides and the ones that are born in that place. So when I'm in Genoa. I do not want a guide from Venice, even though that might be a really good guide. I want Genovese. Or when I'm in Naples, I don't want someone from Tuscany, I want a Neopolitan guide. It just enhances your whole experience and it's very supportive of the place that you're in. But for example, if you are going to be paying for your own food, which a lot of them do, as you go, you pay as you go for the things that you're trying, then your cost for that guide can be drastically less. I mean, down in the south and across in Liguria and in Genoa, you can have 2 or 3 hours out with a licensed private guide for €100, €140. And if you're on a walking tour and there's a bunch of you then that can work out to be like €10, €15 a person. And then you're buying your food. And if it's a street food walking tour, then street food is not expensive. But you can do that really quite cost effectively and have an amazing experience in an incredible part of Italy, really understanding the life of the local people and why they have this street food and what it's all about. Like, port cities are always really good because street food is not that much of a part of most Italian life. But in the port cities, it has a history that goes back to the beginning of time. So the stories and the walking around and all the carry on and the shouting that goes on in the markets and everything, it's so exciting and fun and you get these incredible foods so well worth doing. So we have a strategy of staying where we stay. We go back in neighborhood at least, and then where we eat, we want to be back in neighborhood. And then another thing that you can do that's a good money saver is if

you stay in little towns outside the big towns. So, for example, if you were going to stay in Florence, but you were on a really tight budget, you could stay instead in the Certaldo, which is kind of like at the bottom of where San Gimignano is. So your train ticket in and out of Florence is €5 or something is nothing. And you can stay at a place that's very much less expensive. The place that I stay at in Arezzo - my apartment in Arezzo. I call them all my apartment. I stay at the same places everywhere I go. And so it feels like home. When you've been backwards and backwards and forwards to these different places, it feels like home. So whenever I'm going to Arezzo, I text Fabio and be like, is my apartment available? He's got like a few apartments. He knows which one mine. But this place, if you saw it, you would die. I want to say it's a 16th century Palazzo. It got subdivided into apartments. There's frescoes all over the walls, there's painting on the ceiling. And this apartment is enormous. You could rollerskate and it's huge. It's like if you dreamed about staying somewhere in Tuscany, this apartment is what that dream would look like. It's ridiculous and it costs me less than staying in a shoebox in Florence. I couldn't stay in an apartment like that in Florence would cost me hundreds of dollars per night. It would be very expensive. Whereas going out into a smaller area that is connected by train, I mean the train in and out from Arrezzo to Florence. It's a little bit further. It takes about an hour or so. But it's just so much less expensive.

### **Katy**

Just generally speaking, on location as well, like Rome, Florence and Venice, they're just some of the most (and Sorrento as well), some of the most touristic places in the world. So simple supply and demand equation means that they will be significantly expensive. So you've given some really great tips about moving out in terms of the areas around those cities as well. But if you go into some of the regions that people that we like to talk about on these podcasts and share all these amazing places in Italy, as soon as you get off the beaten path, you are going into like a much different equation in terms of cost.

### **Corinna**

Yeah. And it's not just the cost of your accommodation, it's the cost of every single thing. It's the cost of your coffee, it's the cost of your lunch, it's the cost of everything you do. It's the cost of your tourist tax. I mean, it's every single thing. So when you're on a really tight budget, look out a bit. And if your goal for a lot of people when they're thinking about coming to Italy, especially when it's their first time or two or three or four, they're not quite ready to go way off the grid. They're like, I'm going to travel across the world, go to Italy. I want to see the leaning tower, and I want to see the Duomo and I want to see Venice, and I want to see the Colloseum.

### **Corinna**

And that's understandable. So not all of those people want to go tooling around Basilicata the way I like doing. But you can still be able to go and see all those places and just stay a little bit further out. When you are away from the tourist crowds, you save money, an enormous amount of money. But you also gain an extraordinary amount of experience because now you

are really interacting with Italian folks in a real life situation versus Disneyland. Nobody working in Disneyland can really do so much relationship building and all of that stuff with you because they've just got so many people to deal with. Whereas when you're in the smaller places or a bit further out of the big cities, then, yeah.

### Katy

It's a totally different experience, isn't it? It's more intimate, it's more personal.

### Corinna

Yeah. And that the biggest thing that you will take away from your trip is human connection. So if you build a trip that enables you to have as much human connection as possible, then you're going to come away with a much more enriched experience than if your only experience is being right in the center, where all the crowds are, where everything's expensive, where the waiters are so flat to the board's busy, they can't stop and shoot the breeze and all that kind of stuff. I love it. So now I've got another one for you and this is one that I just did last week. So it's really pertinent and that is buying your train tickets early on the high speed trains. So when we're going the big city to city trains say we're going to Venice to Florence, Florence to Rome, Rome to Torino, wherever you're going on those big high speed trains, what you want to do is you book that ticket as early as possible. So when you make your plans for your trip, say you're going to be in Rome and then you're going to go down to the Amalfi Coast - so you're going to get a train from Rome to Naples and then a driver from Naples to maybe you're staying in Positano. You need to be decisive and go, okay, so on the 5th I go from Rome to Naples. You know that your check out is going to be at 10:00 or 11:00 from wherever you're staying if you're in a hotel or if you're in an Airbnb. So don't plan stuff for that town for that morning because now you've got to figure out your luggage and all that nonsense, be decisive and go, okay, check out is going to be at ten. So I'm going to have a 10:00 train and then you're going to leave your place or 11:00 train. You'll be leaving your Airbnb, you go straight to the train station, get your train, boom, you go down. So with that, we don't need to be this flim-flamming, well, I don't know what time I want to go because you made a decision upfront. Now the train line. So I use Italo all the time and it's my favorite between Italo and the Freccia trains, if there's not an Italo train, then I'll take the Freccia train. But Italo opens up its tickets just over three months before the date, okay? When they open those tickets up, it's the cheapest you're going to get them. And from that moment they keep going up and there's a colossal difference in ticket price. So the tickets that I just bought, they were 34.50 buying them right now. And if I was waiting until the month before, they were going to be \$75 and you can tell what it's going to be by... So I spent like ten days every day clicking into the Italo site waiting for them to open those tickets. And the day they opened, I dropped the hammer and bought them and I got all my tickets through that 2nd June trip. But I was paying approximately half per ticket than if I waited. And when you're talking about the difference between say a 35 Euro ticket and a 75 Euro ticket or a 70 Euro ticket, that's a lot of money. That all adds up. I always put everybody in first class and I like to be in first class. It's just nice on the trains.

**Katy**

Why not if you're saving some money?

**Corinna**

Oh my goodness, yes. And it's going to cost me to go first class the same as it would cost somebody else to go in the economy class, so why not go first class? So this ticket, when you look at it, there might be two different ticket price options, or in this case, there was four and this is to sit in the same seat, in the same carriage of the same train going at the same time. Right. So the first option was going to be €115 for that ticket from Rome to Milan. Okay. And with that, by paying full price, you had no fees for changing - if you had to change time or date. And if you needed a refund, you lost 20%. The next category down was an economy version of the exact same seat on the exact same train. And that was €59. So it's half the price. And for that you have to pay a 20% fee if you need to change your time or your date. And if you need a refund, you lose 40%. The next one was a low cost one, which was €56. And you had a 50% fee for changing tickets. And it's nonrefundable. And then the bottom one was €49 and it's zero refund, zero changing. So that's a cost differential between €150 and €49 for the exact same seat. And so if you're looking at it and going, well, I know that I'm leaving Rome at 10:00 in the morning and going to my next destination. You don't really need that whole refund, this percentage, that percentage, this percentage to change because you've pull the trigger. You've made the decision, you're going at that time.

**Katy**

Yeah. And I think, look, I'm all for that and you do have to be very decisive, but you also have to read the terms and conditions and understand them. So we've had a lot of examples over the last two years, and especially for people that were traveling, planning to travel in 2020 when everything went horribly wrong, trying to get refunds off those tickets and finding it very difficult to do that. But when you purchase those tickets, they're very clear about what those terms and conditions are. So if you've got a concern about that or if you feel like you need some extra protection financially, you should take out travel insurance.

**Corinna**

I won't allow anybody to come on any of my tours without travel insurance in the end.

**Katy**

I mean, we could do a whole podcast about travel insurance couldn't we.

**Corinna**

So, yeah, if something happened and I was to lose that train ticket, like I got sick and couldn't go on that stretch or whatever, that would be covered by my travel insurance. But the big

thing is that by making the decision like you plotted out your itinerary and then buying your train tickets the first moment you can, you're going to save yourself some big chunks of money and you can be riding first class and there's nice first class seats. There's no reason for me to spend €115 on the exact same seat so that I have free changes. - I can change it to 11:00, please. I've made a commitment. I'm going at 10:00. I don't need any of those things. So now you got double savings. And then, of course, we used our travel mileage card to buy it, and you're going to zero it out anyway with your redeem miles. And then combo tickets for getting into places. So a lot of museums and things are on combo tickets where you can see more than one museum on that ticket. Like one of my favorites in Rome is the National Museum ticket, where you get into it has Crypta Balbi, which is a brain bender, and you go to Crypta Balbi, and it's one of the most amazing things I've ever seen. And there's nobody there. Palazzo Altemps, which is, in my opinion, the greatest museum you've never heard of. It's phenomenal. I mean, the Palazzo alone is just nuts. And then it's an unbelievable collection of first and second century sculptures. It's absolutely nuts. And it's at the end of Piazza Navona. You're going to be there anyway. It's just right there. So those who are on that ticket, Palazzo Massimo is on it, and the Baths of Diocletian So you've got four museums on the one ticket, and it's open for like 48 hours or 72 hours or something like that. And they have an option where you can buy just one museum or two museums or three museums or four museums, but it means that you can save a chunk of money by just doing these little combo things.

### **Katy**

That's one that I really didn't know about. And I think a lot of people try and do this trick using the hop on, hop off busses and I'm going to say something about those busses right now. I don't think they're any good. They are in some cities, I have to say, like, if the attractions are really spread out in a place like London where you can actually zip around the streets and that I actually don't think they're such a bad idea. But in Rome or in Florence, it just doesn't even make sense because they can't get anywhere close to any of the attractions and whatever they pack into their package doesn't even make sense.

### **Corinna**

In a city like Rome. Rome is a walking city you miss so much if you're not on your feet when you're walking in Rome, there's so much more than the street between point A and point B, you're going to see a million details across 2000 years of architecture and history. It's just everywhere. And I feel that you just missed too much. When you're on those hop on, hop off buses. I would rather see a third of the things and see them on foot and interact with Roman humans. My favorite. But there's all these things that you can do.

### **Katy**

That is an example of somewhere where they sort of say that you're saving money, but I really don't think that you are actually, because even with those passes what they do is now you have to pay a booking fee. You can't just turn up to the Vatican, and you still have to book your spot with the Vatican and the Colosseum separately. So it's kind of pointless.

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**Corinna**

In my opinion, which actually brings me to my next thing on the list.

**Katy**

Great

**Corinna**

And that is, if you're traveling on a budget, what you want to do is figure out what is your most important thing, what is your absolute thing, and you put your money into that, and you make sure you do it. So the first time I took my son Tommy with me, he was, like ten years old or eleven years old. And I said to him, we're doing Rome. And so we sat down, we made a list of things that he wanted to see. And I said, okay, well, we'll do some of these on our own, and we'll do one thing, like we'll do, like a guided deal - what would you like to do for that? And he picked the Vatican. And this is so rad and so synergistic because I bought us tickets to do a Vatican tour, and I didn't have enough money for us to be able to do Vatican and going into St. Peters. So I just bought us the Vatican, so you'd finish at the Sistine, and then off you go. Wow. The guide that we booked was none other than Angelo, who was on just a couple of episodes ago.

**Katy**

Oh, I love it!

**Corinna**

I was like oh my God, it's Angelo.

**Corinna**

He was the greatest. If you get the chance to book a tour with Angelo, jump all over it. He is the absolute greatest. Incredible tour guide. He's a walking, talking encyclopedia, but he's a really fun, really gregarious, tremendous person. And he went to theater school in Los Angeles. So when he tells a story, he's, like, telling it with everything, and the hands are going and everything's going. So, Tommy, we get in there, and when you get to the Vatican, there's like a billion people. It's a lot. But Tommy locked onto Angelo like you've never seen and we're in this group of 15 strangers or something or 20 or however many we were. But Tommy was joined at the hip to Angelo and Angelo, seeing this kid is, like, in, like, in boots and all - wants to know everything and is asking a million questions and all the rest of it. Angelo is a fun dude. So he kept Tommy with them and everything, we go all the way through, and we get to the end of the Sistine. And I'm like, our ticket finishes here, so say goodbye to Angelo. And Angelo is like, "NO!!". He goes, "Tommy must do Saint Peters" And I'm like, I'm sorry. Our ticket is only to here. And he goes, you can leave. Tommy's staying with me. I'll want to meet

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you outside with Tommy. Tommy's like, Please, mommy, please. And so he goes off with Angelo and the people from the tour that were going on to St. Peters. I'm waiting outside the main doors of St. Peters for Tommy to come out. And, like, after about 20 minutes or whatever it was the other people from the tour came out. No Angelo, no Tommy. And I'm like, oh, my God, my kid's being kidnapped. And they came out, like, a half hour later. And I'm like, what was that? And he's like, "Tommy was enjoying himself. So I showed him some more things." It was the greatest thing ever. So when I turned on the Untold Italy podcast, and I just automatically click into the next one, so I wasn't reading to see what it was about, and I hear this voice, and it's Angelo, and I died. He's just such a great dude.

### **Katy**

It was such an amazing episode as well, and just such a fantastic idea to talk about the female protagonist of History of Italy. I mean, it's something that I'm really passionate about.

### **Corinna**

And he talked about And Livia is, like, my favorite. She's one of my favorite women in history. She's so great. She's just murdering everybody, but she's brilliant. So you pick the things - like the super important things to you and make sure you put all your money into that. Make sure you get that. If the Vatican is your thing, make sure you get the really good Vatican tour, or if the Colosseum isn't getting a really good Colosseum tour. So you do put that money there, and then you can do some of the other things a little bit less expensive than maybe picking up the audio tour and doing that if you're pressed for money. Like, I have an amazing Colosseum guide that I use for all of my tours, but she's mad expensive. Like, even now, I couldn't pay that for myself. Yeah, it's mad expensive. So I would have to find a way to do something more cost effective. But you want to make sure that the things that are your absolute bucket list, that you're diverting money so that you can do that thing. And the great thing is, if you've been playing the mileage game, you sink your money into that killer tour, and then you exit out with redeeming those miles across. It's brilliant.

### **Katy**

Absolutely. And I think if you're in a slightly bigger group, maybe you've got four or six people. Then I wouldn't just look at small group tours or larger group tours. I think you can actually get a pretty good deal on private tours if you've got a larger group. And one site that I love is With Locals. And on a lot of their tours, the kids go free for that. And the tours on that are very reasonable. They're all private. And you can, like, they have set itineraries you can work from, and then you can also create your own itinerary, if you've got particular interest in anything. But yeah, their prices are really reasonable. So if you have a large group, definitely look into that.

### **Corinna**

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Even if you have a large group. I mean, if there's four of you, if there's three of you and you're splitting that cost, it can be great. And if you're traveling on your own. So I do a lot of trips where I whip over there on my own and tour around and I always like, great ways to save money. But you can do something like reach out to a guide and say, I'm going to be here by myself, there's no way I can pay for a tour with you by myself - do you have a group that I could tag on to? Or if not, do you have a friend that's a licensed guide like you that does little groups. And sometimes they'll be like, you know what? Let me call my client and ask them. And the client will be like, yeah, let somebody else come along with us. It's fine. And you're with the Smith family and you're chugging along, but you're paying a much smaller fee. Or they might put you together with a friend of theirs who does small walking tours for randoms. They'll have ten to a tour, but everybody has come in from wherever, and your cost is much lower.

**Katy**

These are all fantastic tips.

**Corinna**

One more tip.

**Katy**

Okay

**Corinna**

Tip number ten. And that is we're going to swipe smart. So we only travel with a credit card. That is a travel card so that it has no international fees. What I tell my tour groups is when you're buying stuff like you're buying whatever, use your travel card for that, swipe for that. We only use our debit card to pull cash from the cash machine. But you need to find out from your bank well ahead of time what their fees are to use that debit card, because most of them will have like a \$3 international fee. But then they'll tack on 2% or 3% of the total that you're withdrawing. If that's what your bank does, now you've got time to sniff around and find somebody to open a separate account with. So here in the US, we have banks and credit unions. The credit unions, most of them will do a no fee international debit card. So you might be paying that like \$3 per withdrawal, but you're not paying an additional 2%. There's an investment house here in the US called Charles Schwab. And Schwab have an account that you can open that the debit card is free overseas. So it's really brilliant. But what you want to do is understand what these costs are. And you only use that debit card when you're pulling out a chunk of money. You're not swiping at the supermarket and swiping everywhere that you normally would here at home, because each time you're going to have a \$3 fee plus a 2 or 3% fee on top, and suddenly your money is gone. So we just figured that out ahead of time so we can be really smart and we pull our money and then we've got cash for days.

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## Katy

Well, you know what I do is I use this Wise debit card and what you can do is have buckets of money and it's really good for a backup actually. So you can transfer - they have excellent exchange rates, so you can transfer I transfer my Australian dollars and then I can have it in a little bucket and when I need to transfer over to Euros, you transferred at their excellent rate and use their debit card to withdraw in Euros, so you don't attract the extra fees. But the main cruncher of money, the one in terms of when you're taking out money is you never ever use a Euro Bank. Oh my goodness, they are robbers, aren't they?

## Corinna

Yeah. And you don't pull cash at the airport. I actually have this whole thing that I go through. I send out to all of my people ahead of time for my tourists and I really drum it into them. We only ever pull cash from a bank ATM, inside the bank during hours when the bank is open. Because first of all, we don't want anybody to be able to clone it. And you'll see ATM things all over the place, but they're not always attached to a bank. If it's not attached to a bank, it's a money maker for somebody else. And also we don't want to have our card cloned. So if you happen to go inside the bank and there's cameras and stuff, then there's less chance of that happening. But the other thing is if it eats your card, you want that bank to be open because most of the time when we're traveling, we're then moving on to the next place. And it was a few years ago now I was in Sicily down in Milanese about to take the boat across to Lipari and we stopped by a bank and I said to the people I was traveling with, we only do it inside and we only do this, that and the other we go inside and they have the ATM machine open because it has eaten someone's card. And I was like, see, I told you if you've done this outside or if you've done it when the bank wasn't open and your card is eaten, now what's your plan? Because we're getting on that boat. So it's just like a little bit of smart strategy. Yeah.

## Katy

Always have a backup too. Oh Corinna. Amazing, incredible tips. You have such a wealth of knowledge. We appreciate you and all the thought and attention that you put into your podcast episodes, your books, and also your regular newsletters. How can our listeners stay connected with you and continue learning and exploring Italy with you and all your fabulous ideas?

## Corinna

So if you go to my website, it's corinnacooke.com and I'm sure it will be in the show notes, from there you have my social media and my newsletter - there's a tab you can sign up for the newsletter. All the notifications about new books coming out and everything, it all kind of feeds through there so it's like a really good one central location where you can get stuff. And I hope that all of that made sense to everybody, especially the things about working the mileage programs and everything. I'm really hoping that this episode will help you to save

some money and be able to do some extra things with your trip or go on a trip when you didn't think you could.

### **Katy**

It's so inspiring, Corinna. Thank you, everyone. Corinna is so, so generous in everything that she does so make sure you follow along with her as not only is it informative but also lots of fun. I have so much loved our chat today - I think we saved everyone thousands of dollars, so grazie Corinna, thank you so much for coming.

### **Corinna**

Thanks so much, Katy and thanks, everybody. Bye bye. Ciao.

### **Katy**

Well they were some incredible ideas for saving money before and during your trip. I think regardless of your travel style you'll find some ways to stretch your trip budget a little further so you can treat yourself to some of the more luxe experiences and artisan wares you can find in Italy.

And for those of you who thought traveling to Italy was financially out of reach I hope you're now inspired to follow Corinna's tips so you can make your travel dreams come true.

All the details and links we mentioned are in the show notes at [untolditaly.com/116](https://untolditaly.com/116) for episode 116 as well as Corinna's details so you can stay in touch with her too.

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did then it would be amazing if you gave us a rating or review in your favorite podcast app. If you're using apple podcasts then you need to go to the show page for Untold Italy - not the episode page - and scroll down until you see "ratings and reviews" You can leave your 5 star review and message there.

It's such a thrill to read your enthusiastic reviews and a testament to the whole team - Katie my assistant who also pulls together the amazing show notes and Mark our audio wizard who make tweeting birds and other back ground noises disappear. They are both wonderful and this podcast wouldnt happen without them

They're busily working away on next week's episode as we speak So until then it's "ciao for now".