

Untold Italy Episode 119 - My favorite Italian Places with Ishita Sood

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 119.

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 a tutti! Katy here with a very special episode of Untold Italy and one that's really important to me, because today I'm introducing you to a friend of mine who I've connected with over Instagram and various places on the internet, who shares my love (and yours) of Italy.

Many of you have written beautiful notes to me over the past 2 years telling me how this podcast has helped you through some tough times in the pandemic. Truth is, it's also helped me more than you know. Connecting with people in Italy and people who love Italy has been the sparkle in many a difficult day and one of the people that adds lots of sparkle is Ishita Sood from the wonderful blog Italophilia.

Ishita is from India and lives in the bustling metropolis of Delhi, a whole world away from the Italian towns and villages she fell in love with but she keeps her connection to Italy alive in some very surprising ways. I can't wait for you to meet her, and hear the stories of her favorite places in Italy

Katy

Benvenuta Ishita! Welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Ishita

Thank you, Katy. Thank you so much for having me here.

Katy

Oh, wow. It's so great to finally talk to you in person Ishita. I feel like we've been riding out this pandemic together in different corners of the globe just united by a love for Italy.

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Ishita

Oh, yes, absolutely.

Katy

And I know, Ishita, with your blog and your Instagram, you've just got such a massive passion for Italy. And I've just found out about your job, which is so interesting. Do you want to tell your listeners what you do?

Ishita

Yes, of course. I think a lot of people don't know because I don't like to talk about it much, but this is a great platform to share about my job. So I'm working with an Italian client since the past four years, and I go from client to client and contract to contract. Currently, I am working as a transcriber for a big communications company in Italy, and I transcribe their files from Italian. And then I also do a little artificial intelligence analysis for their company.

Katy

I think it's amazing. I love that you're in Delhi and you're doing transcriptions in Italian. It's fantastic. I love it. I love it. So tell us your story. How did you come to fall in love with Italy?

Ishita

Oh, wow. I feel like it happened, like, a lifetime ago because I don't see myself without Italy at all. I don't have, like, an ounce of Italian blood in me. But here we are talking about Italy, a country so far away, and there's no connection at all. Anyway, so starting with how it all began, I went on a girl's trip to Europe. This was almost a decade ago. And my friend and I, we wanted to go travel to several countries in Europe. We were really ambitious, and we wanted to do, like, all these places, Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain. And then we realized that, oh, wow, that's like a lot of money, and that's going to be hugely costly for us. So we just narrowed it down to Italy and Spain. And so we decided, okay, let's take a three week backpacking trip to Italy and let's spend a couple of nights in Spain and then see how it goes. Since I was younger, I've always wanted to see the Colosseum, and that's all I knew about Italy, that's it - pizza and Colosseum. I really didn't know anything. And I was like, okay, can we go to Rome? Because I really wanted to see the Colosseum. And she was like, yeah, let's go to Rome. Let's spend a few nights there. This friend of mine had some friends who had also gone to the Cinque Terre. So that was like, at that time, like, say about ten years ago, no one had heard of the Cinque Terre in India. So she was like, hey, do you also want to see, like, a couple of more towns and cities and I was like, yeah, sure, let's do that. So we ended up making, like, a 15 day trip to Italy. And it was so ambitious, so packed with places moving from North to South. South to North and center. I don't know what we were doing. And you're in your 20s, and you have that zest - you just want to keep going. And it was quite bizarre, now that I think about it. So that's how it started. I went on my first trip to Italy. I completely fell in love with Rome. I mean, the minute I landed there, I think I felt this sort of

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connection. I know that every Italophile is probably smiling at this time because it's just hard to explain, right?

Ishita

There are some places that you just want to be in forever. So that's how I felt with Rome. And believe me, like, I had no knowledge of the culture, the language. I didn't know how anything worked. And I remember the first day in Rome, I asked for a cold coffee, and they gave me, like, a shot of really dark espresso, like, really dark cafe. And I didn't know at that time. And I was like, what have they given me? And it was like a culture shock. So, I mean, coming from that time to now that I'm here working in Italian, having so many friends across the world, thanks to Italophilia, I just can't believe. So my story is just so cliché, but at the same time, so unique because I feel like from India, I'm like that quel Indiana. I'm like that Indian girl who's in love with Italy and who just comes to Italy every year because she's just fallen in love with the culture.

Katy

That's such a great story. I do feel that connection, and I had that feeling exactly myself. And it's a strange thing. If you've never felt it before, then it's something like being at home, but you know that you're away from home as you could possibly be, but you still feel like you're at home, and it's a very special thing. So after that first trip, were you just, like, constantly planning, well, how do I get back? What am I going to do? And what spurred you on from there?

Ishita

Once I got back, there was a lack. There was a lack in my life. I felt that there was something missing, and it was really hard to explain because my friend wasn't feeling that. So I came back and I got to my job. I got to my regular life, and I ended up going on Twitter and looking for people who like Italy. I mean, I don't even remember the keywords that I probably must have used to search such people, but I ended up connecting to a lot of people. And then Twitter suggest you. And then Twitter kept suggesting more people. And there was this woman, Margie Miklas, who is also an author, and she's written lots of memoirs on Italy. She pushed me and guided me to write a blog. And at that time, I had already started penning down my thoughts on my past travel to Italy on a blogger website. And at that time, it was so popular to get on blogger and write your thoughts. Anyway, I started that and she said that I'm going to find my voice soon and I should keep writing. And I think I got that push from her and it's thanks to her. Then I eventually connected to a lot of people online and a couple of years later, we met in person in Venice. So that's how it started. Like, I came back to India, I felt the lack connected with people and just started writing. And you never imagined people reading your website and especially things that are just so normally written/penned down. So I noticed people were reading my blog and then a couple of people told me to move to WordPress and then I had my own hosted website. It's just crazy how it all panned out.

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Katy

And it still keeps going. So then after that first trip, when was the next trip that you went back?

Ishita

The next year. I kept booking every year. I just wanted to see new places. And then I traveled solo every year after that, except for the last time when I went on a honeymoon with my husband.

Katy

Did he get the feeling too, or he's kind of had to?

Ishita

I think he kind of had to, but he ended up really liking Italy, and I had no doubts about that. I knew that he'd love Italy. He's a big foodie. He loves just moving, exploring different places for the food. And I took him to Emilia Romagna, so you can imagine how fun that must have been. We also went to Liguria and Rome, of course, so he ended up loving Italy. But I also think part of him had no choice.

Katy

Yeah, totally. Well, good choosing by you, too, because someone who is obviously open to embracing the things that you love, that sounds like an excellent partner. Okay, so you had that first impression, and it's a feeling, isn't it? It's not really - you've got everything all around you, and like you said, you were darting from the north to the south. And goodness knows, I did that in my 20s, too. And you have to do that to learn the hard way, really. No one can tell you. Especially not if they're older. It's just like no one's in their 20s wants anyone to tell them to slow down. But how have your impressions of Italy changed over time.

Ishita

I remember being really surprised by the slowness of life in Italy. In India, we don't take a moment to pause. We don't. I know that in the Pandemic, we have all done it on our own levels, but I feel like Italy really taught me to just stop, pause, and reflect. And on my first two trips, I really didn't get that. I did not understand that. And my first impression was, why are the shops closed during lunch? Why aren't they more available? Just very small things. And now I feel like I've just embraced it so beautifully and I've just blended in in a way that is indescribable at this point. I don't know how it happened, but I think all these years of connecting with Italians and just being on the road and spending, like at least three to four weeks every year, sometimes even twice a year, has led me to become the person I am. So overall, I feel like from how it started back in 2012/13 and how it is now, I feel like there's

been a huge difference in the way I see Italy and in the way I embrace life on my own personally.

Katy

Wow. And do you bring that piano, piano or slowly, slowly approach to life, but when you come home, back to India?

Ishita

I'm trying. I do try. I mean, it's not easy. But for instance, I feel like even at work, having worked with Italians from north or the center, there's a difference in the pace of life in both the regions, both the areas. So, for instance, my Northern bosses, Milanese, and it was always like, okay, what are we doing next and how are we going to get there? And whereas people from the center are much more relaxed. So I do try to imbibe that in my work, since I work on a daily basis in Italian, it is important for me. But as I said, that it's hard because it's not our culture. We are just used to driving. We are just used to moving. There's a lot of competition. There's a lot of who's getting this, who's getting that, and what's the next step? Whereas in Italy, I see a very different style of living. Very different.

Katy

Yeah. It's completely different, isn't it? And I think that I don't know about you, but I find it a little bit of a challenge to step back into it a little bit. So it takes a couple of days just to go. I'm here. I need to just soften the pace a bit, really. But it's a good reminder, I think.

Ishita

Yes, it is.

Katy

Yeah. Okay. Ishita, I invited you onto the podcast because it's a bit selfish, actually, because I really did want to know what were your favorite places in Italy, because I feel like someone who's got such a passion for Italy and such a spirit of adventure that goes off and explores you may have uncovered some really unique places that other people might be interested in. So shall we start by talking about some of your favorite places?

Ishita

Oh, yes, absolutely. I mean, it's hard to just pick a couple of favorite places because Italy is just gorgeous from the north to the south. But there have been certain places that have just stuck to me and I would really like to go back or just explore more, maybe spend like a month there just being there and doing nothing and just vibing with the locals or just speaking in Italian, which is like my ambition now for life. I think that's what I want to do. So the first place that I'd pick was Perugia. It was the first city that had traveled to solo and it remains to

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be one of those beautiful experiences of my life that I just can't describe. You know how it is when you're just all by yourself and especially when you're moving from your country and taking that first solo trip on your own and you're in your 20s and you're just free. You're not even married at that time, so you're just a very different headspace. Perugia was absolutely stunning. I still remember when I was walking towards Piazza Novembre. It's the main Piazza and my bus had dropped me at a certain point and I had to climb up the hill, take the escalator, and I was just moving and it was 9:30 in the night and I had no idea that in the summer the sun would set a little late in Europe because in India we have a very balanced time of sunset and sunrise. So it was 9:30 and the sun was setting and it just blew my mind and the city looked so beautiful. There was this orangish hue on the buildings, on these old palazzi and I just can't forget it. It was like one of those magical moments that you just want to pen down and write it in a book. So Perugia is one of those places where I also met this friend of mine who is an Italian. We were staying in the same hostel. We ended up connecting through Google Translate because she didn't know English and I didn't know Italian and I mean, it's amazing to see yourself now because she now knows English and I know Italian, so she visited India, I showed her around, I went to Mantua and she visited me from Piemonte and it just bled out so beautifully for the two of us.

Katy

Oh, wow, Perugia, you made a friend and you saw a beautiful sunset and this is a medieval city in Umbria, and it's a University city and I think University cities to me have such a great energy about them anywhere in the world, really, but especially in Italy because they're smaller and you've got that vibe of the students everywhere, young people hanging out, maybe having a aperitivo and a coffee. It is pretty special.

Ishita

It is amazing.

Katy

Is there any other amazing parts of Perugia or experiences that you had there?

Ishita

The whole city was a discovery for me because it was the first time I was in a hilltop town in Italy all by myself. So just walking all across in the main piazza, in itself a beauty. And then the road that goes to the aqueduct in Perugia is one of the most beautiful places. Again, locals help a lot in Italy. And I remember walking with a couple who were telling me all about the area of the aqueduct. And they were like, oh, you must go here for a photo opportunity or you must go here for this. And that was like one of those amazing experiences of my time in Perugia. And of course, with this friend of mine who was also staying in the hostel, we ended up exploring a lot of the city ourselves. She knew Italian so she took me to a restaurant where we had like a four course meal, which we had to get back, get it to the

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hostel. And the people were just frowning at us. They were like, who are these people who can't finish their meal? And I remember getting pasta to pack because it was just impossible to finish it. And in Italy, it's not common to get takeaways also, it's just not common at all. And that was also another culture shock for me. I didn't know. So Perugia was absolutely beautiful, thanks to this friend of mine. She and I explored bits of the region together. Like we went to Assisi, I solo traveled to Gubbio. There was an ancient medieval festival called Festa dei Ceri, which happens every year on May 15, as you might be knowing. And it was one of those bizarre experiences of my life with thousands and thousands of people in the main piazza and people just picking up those huge wax candles which are called cherries and going up the hill. So that festival starts in the morning and goes until midnight. And it's just those things that those traditions that you're taking on from centuries, possibly six or seven centuries, it's still going on. So Umbria in itself was a revelation for me. After Rome and Florence and Venice and then Cinque Terre and parts of Tuscany, which are quite touristy, this was that trip that made me see the other Italy where people are kind of - where no one takes credit cards in the bar, and people are just like, can you just give me €2 for your cup of coffee? In general, I received a lot of support from the locals. There was this man whose name is Lorenzo. He owns a Castle in Umbria, and he just emailed me, he saw my blog and he emailed me and we connected and he said that, oh, would you like a tour of my castle? And he also lives there, ,Castello di Montegiove and he lives there. He showed me around, he took me on a tour to his vineyards. And it was just an amazing experience. I think I've just been very fortunate to have found locals in Italy who have gone out of the way to show this Indiana their country.

Katy

Yeah, well, I think Ishita you're obviously very open minded and friendly and generous, and I think that can take you so many places all around the world and it's so wonderful that you've had so many great experiences. Is there another place where you've had similar experiences that really pulls at your heartstrings?

Ishita

So another place I picked is in Le Marche. It's called Mercatello sul Metauro. The name is a handful, but the village name is Mercatello and sul Metauro means on the river Metauro. Metauro is the river in Le Marche. So this is one of those incredible experiences that I found through Margie. So Margie had told me about this lady in Le Marche who owns a historic Palazzo and I really wanted to go and stay there for a couple of nights. So we ended up talking, that lady and I, and she said, oh, I'd love to have you here, I'd love to host you for a couple of nights. And I went to Italy and she took me all around in her car in parts of Tuscany and we ended up reaching Le Marche. So Mercatello is her family town, her family village. They are the Donati family and they are known in that village because it's just 300, 400 people village how it is in Italy. And then when I was there, I stayed there for three or four nights and I became that Indian who's come to see their village from all across the continents. And I became so famous that in the morning everyone was at the bar, just congregated at the

bar to say, oh, she's here, that Indiana, she's here. It was amazing. I received so much kindness from the people there. They wanted to open up the churches that hadn't been opened in weeks. They wanted to show me the arch there, they wanted to show me the best spots for sunset. The locals invited me to their home. We had the best wine, we had everything possible that was like, I feel like I'm a strong believer in what you give, you get back, as you said, that, yes, you have to be open, but you also have to be kind. So I think I received a lot of kindness because I was just open to the whole aura, the whole vibe of these locals in Mercatello. And people were giving me tips on where I should go next, what I should see, how I could travel to a certain place. So this lady, Luisa, who is from the Donati family, of course, we explored a lot of the market together, but it was amazing how she would just connect me to the right people and she'd be like, oh, Ishita you'll love this painting studio. Come, let's have a look. Or let's go to Urbania or Urbino and let's look at the art there, or let's go to see a pottery making shop or something. So she just knew what I'd like and she ended up taking me to a lot of these places. I don't consider myself as a huge museum lover and she sensed that and she knew that I would find that probably slightly boring and I'm more an outside sort of a girl. And we ended up going to a lot of places where there was a river on the side and a small ristorante. They had the best local cheese, best wine. I mean, what do you need? What else do you need?

Ishita

Near Mercatello, there was this bed and breakfast and it was owned by these 60, 70 something year olds. And it was at a river mill. So this couple, when they got to know that I'm coming, they made a huge fanfare. The lady cooked so many delicious meals for me, fried artichokes, rabbit, and she had the best salads for me. And I went to the kitchen and she even wanted me to help her. So I think that was one of those incredible experiences that you just can't forget. And I'd love to just go back for those.

Katy

Yeah, absolutely. That sounds incredible. I can see that's your little home away from home, your little Italian village. How far inland is it? Is it near the coast or is it further inland?

Ishita

It's further inland. So it's closer to Pizzaro and Urbino, so much higher in the mountains and definitely further away from the coast. It's in the north of Le Marche.

Katy

Okay.

Ishita

But in Le Marche, I feel like overall it's such an underrated region and so few people end up visiting there. And I have no complaints there. But I feel that places like Recanati or Urbino, they just don't get mentions even in guidebooks, because not many people end up going there. And while Le Marche has a beautiful coast and there's the obvious choices where Italians go. Sirolo, Numana and all these places. But I think there's so much beyond the coast.

Katy

Yeah. But I think what happens in Italy is there's some really and it happens all around the world, too, actually, is that there's some places that are very well connected by transport and there's lots of information about them online. So what happens then is that everyone just goes to the same places. And it's a little bit of a shame, really, because listen to this story that you've got of all the friends you made and all the dishes you learned to make and you didn't have to sign up for any cooking class, you did it all by yourself.

Ishita

Absolutely nothing. I just think that I sort of attract people who also are open to new cultures. And the people that I ended up meeting, a lot of them are also big, big fans of Indian culture. So there's that common connection, too. And a lot of these people have also come to India, three of them, in fact, the girl from Perugia, Luisa, and then another friend from Torino. So I have so many places, it's very hard to list, like just a couple of places neatly. But continuing that, I'd also add Turin, Trieste, ???Modica in the South, Loconodondo, all these smaller, smaller towns, which I feel are hugely underrated. Even big cities like Torino, they get side lined, maybe because of their sister cities like Milan or the big 3s.

Katy

Yeah. Well with Torino is it's a bit strange, really? Because I really think people. Why do they miss Torino? Because a lot of people are coming from France and it's a logical stop from there. And it's only 1 hour from Milan. In fact, I haven't been there yet and I'm in trouble because my husband's Auntie is from there. She goes, Why you don't go? I said, I'm going, I'm going.

Ishita

I think, as you mentioned earlier, that because public transport or the way the cities are connected is not so easy. That could be a reason that regions like Le Marche gets sidelined, because that's what I noticed there too, that there was a lack of public transport. Of course there was trains. But to get to a hilltop, you don't have the train. So you ended up either you have beautiful locals like the ones I met. But I know that it's not possible for everyone to have guidance or just help from locals on their trip. And while I think places like Torino, I think they just get sidelined because they're not spoken enough. And I certainly feel like even these big travel bloggers also don't end up going there.

Katy

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Yeah, for sure. I mean, if you look at doing any searches of YouTube, we're really only mentioning a few places. And that's really not to get too sidelined, but that's the point of this podcast. And the point of my website is just to really just try and say to people, hey, you don't have to spend your whole trip, but have a look over there. Just have a look. I'm telling you, you're going to love it.

Ishita

Just a look-see there. No, I definitely do feel that even on Italophilia, I try to promote both the big cities and the small towns. And a lot of people ask me, do you not like big cities? And I said, no, it's not that I don't like big cities. I just feel like there should be a healthy balance. It's the same as people come to India. They see Agra, Delhi and a couple of cities in Rajasthan, and then they don't see the real India, like the smaller towns, the villages. And it's just so gorgeous here. I mean, people end up missing a lot because it's the same drill, the big 3s.

Katy

Yeah. Maybe it's a little bit of fear, but there's no fear. Listen to Ishita she's had such amazing experiences getting off the beaten path. It's wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. Okay. So I want to hear more, though. I want to hear more which other places? Now, you mentioned Trieste, and I want to know a little bit more about why you love Trieste.

Ishita

Trieste was just a find by chance. I wanted to visit Slovenia and I was unsure whether I should take the flight from Florence or if there was a flight from Florence etc, and I ended up on this web page. I think it was some travel forum that was telling me that there's a way to Slovenia directly from Italy, and that to by car. And this was years ago, maybe seven years ago, eight years ago. And I said, okay, well, let me see where the base is. And then I ended up going to Trieste for that because from Trieste, Slovenia is just an hour or so. I might be wrong about the exact time, but I had to go to Ljubljana, and I took a base in Trieste for a couple of days. And I feel like that city is so different from the rest of Italy. What took me by surprise was that whole Austrian German vibe in the city, and I think that's what I ended up loving. And there's this whole literary feel in the air and statues of authors on the road. It's just another kind of city that is very underrated.

Ishita

So that was a pull, and the main piazza is just breathtaking. It's just mind blowing. I mean, you would never imagine that there be the sea and the mountains, a healthy blend of both. And Trieste is just absolutely fantastic. I didn't get to spend a lot of time in Trieste, but I'd love to go back to see the university - I thought, there's a coffee University there in Trieste. University of Coffee - imagine, like!! And then there are so many smaller towns around that there was this port town called Muggia, where I had gone as a day trip. I just took a bus, and I

sat, and in like 30 minutes, I was in a new town, and it was such a beautiful town. My heart stood beautiful pastel colored town. It was ruled by the Venetians for centuries. So it has the symbolic lion on the church, and there are traces of the Venetians everywhere. There's a tiny little castle on the hill, and it's just fantastic and great seafood.

Katy

That sounds incredible. This is the thing. I think we are very similar because I love anything where the Venetians went, because I love looking out for the winged lion. And I love the vibe of the places. It's got that very. It's almost a little bit cosmopolitan. It's got a really cool vibe. And as an aside, Slovenia is a great country to visit, too, and I highly recommend it, even if you have to tear yourself away from Italy. It's a good sidetrack.

Ishita

Yeah, definitely it is.

Katy

Wow. And Ishita, I know you're a big book lover. Is there any places that you've been to that were inspired by your readings? Coz I know you love books.

Ishita

One series that inspired me to take a trip was Inspector Montalbano series by Andrea Camilleri. I think you knew that I was going to mention that because everyone talks about Andrea Camilleri, and they just sort of connect me to him. So years ago when I discovered Andrea Camilleri, it was an Assisi in a bookstore and I wanted to read more because there were translations everywhere. And that time I didn't know Italian. So I ended up picking the first book. And then I just eventually ended up reading the entire series. And a couple of years later, I wanted to make a trip to Sicily. I was in Palermo, and then I thought, oh, why don't I also add the other side of Sicily where these books are now made into a TV series? So this TV series is shot in this part of Sicily, Modica, Ragusa, Scicli, that whole area. And so during that whole planning of Palermo, I thought, okay, why don't I also add this? And that was like one of those moments where I just lived the entire TV series, the entire book series there in Sicily. So Inspector Montalbano was a major inspiration for me to just go there and see those absolutely rugged, intensely beautiful cities in Sicily. And again, another underrated area. A lot of people don't end up going to Sicily. And I feel that's a big shame. A lot of people don't end up going to the south, I know. So I feel like there's a rich tradition, rich historic traditions in different cities of Sicily. They're just all so diverse. All of them.

Katy

Yeah. That area, the Val di Noto, is really one of my favorites. It's something very special. It's obviously flattened by earthquakes and what have you and rebuilt in this amazing baroque

style. But it's got a really interesting energy, and there's lots of it's just, like, sucks you in, really, doesn't it? This is hard to explain until you've been there, but it's really got that fascinating mix of cultures and history and delicious food. Amazing.

Ishita

But yeah, it's just I think if you find the right people to connect also, it's beautiful to see it from a local point of view. I was incredibly fortunate to meet this bed and breakfast owner who told me that there was this guy who takes these Montelbano tours in Modica, Ragusa, and Scicli.. And I was just staying there, and I had no idea and I just said, okay, do you think that there is a possibility that he would do one for me, just me, and that would have involved, like, a huge cost, but this guy was really sweet. He was like, okay, let me ask. And so this person who was taking these Montelbano tours, he took me around to all these three/ four cities, and we ended up discussing about the show in broken Italian, because at that time I was still not even intermediate at my level. And it was just amazing to connect with people who are as passionate about their region. And he ended up telling me about this earthquake and how these cities had to be rebuilt from scratch. I mean, it happened in the 16th century, if I'm not wrong, and that earthquake really shattered the whole area in ways that are really unimaginable. So he mentioned all of those things. And I remember reading this new word in Italian. Oh, this is how you call earthquake in Italian and how these small experiences, they just take you so far.

Katy

Yeah, absolutely. And so I think the tip here is follow your books. I think it can really transport you. You've pictured it in your mind, and then suddenly when you're there, it's a whole new experience. And like, I've got a pile of books behind me and one of my favorite ones is A Room of the View. It's like one of my favorite books of all time. And yeah, just when you read that bit or you see the amazing Merchant Ivory version of the film, which is just absolutely incredible, the fields of Fiesole and just outside Florence, and you're just like, oh, my goodness. And you have to see it for yourself. And sometimes when you go to places and you see it for yourself, they're a little bit disappointing. But I've never found that in Italy. Actually, I agree.

Ishita

People might think we're biased, but it's true.

Katy

We admit it. It's fine.

Ishita

Yeah, absolutely. And I feel like there's so much to Italy then just of course, as I always say, there's so much to Italy beyond the big 3. But there's nothing against the big tree. I love the big tree. But even these small places, like, for instance, Mantua, I was there for a literature festival. I was volunteering for five days in Mantua. And this literature festival happens every year in September. I planned it because I wanted to spend my birthday, which is also during the same time. And I thought that it'd be great. And I feel like I saw not even one foreigner there not even one. It was just a city full of locals because again, it just gets sidelined. These places are just so underrated, so beautiful.

Katy

That's another University city, isn't it? Mantua?

Ishita

Yeah, I think so. I think so. Not wrong.

Katy

Yeah. And it's got a beautiful Piazza and beautiful plazzi and all of those things. I know because I've been doing a little research because we're planning to stop there on our way down south from the Lakes later on this year. So I'm very excited to stop in Mantua for a little bit. Probably not long enough, I should imagine. But anyway, the other place that I know that we share of love for is Liguria. And there are some places that you wanted to tell us about in Liguria that you absolutely love, right?

Ishita

Yeah. Liguria is also one of those regions. I know you've spoken so much on the podcast. Also, I've been following all the episodes on Liguria because again, people just end up going to the Cinque Terre, but there's so much beyond that. So I have friends from Piemonte who have a home there, and we ended up going to a lot of these cities that are close to Savona, the commune of Imperia, which is not in Cinque Terre. So I'd say that Liguria is just mind blowing. There was this tiny little village called Cervo. It's pushed on top of a hill and it overlooks sea, and there are these beautiful romantic lanes that you just want to get lost in. Tiny little bars, a stunning baroque church. And it's pastel, so it's just so soothing on the eye, and it's absolutely amazing. So Liguria was a find for me. I'd say after my first trip to Cinque Terre, I thought that was it. But these tiny little towns Savona, as I said, Cervo. Then there's a town called ????. Dotch aqua. Then, of course, we have the capital city, Genoa, I think. There's nothing like it. Unfortunately, I got to spend just a day there. I didn't have much time. Time is always less when you're in Italy. Genoa was another fantastic find. I'd love to just go there for the aquarium next time and probably spend a couple of days to see the palazzi as well. But like the focaccia di recco, the best mind blowing, and just such simple food with a handful of ingredients. And it's just amazing. So Liguria, while it may be famous worldwide for its best, though, I think that these towns that I mentioned, they never get spoken about. And there

was this place called Finale Ligure, where there are also tiny little trails for hitchhikers and for mountain climbers. And there'd be stores selling mountain gears because there's so many wonderful trails that people from Germany and France especially come to hikes. And there are also a lot of cycling tracks around the area. So all of this was possible if you either you have help or you just read and explored a lot about it and you're either there and you're speaking about it with some locals. And I think that knowing Italian has really helped me to get the trip to another level, because it's not easy to get lost. When you know Italian, you know how it is. You always have people speaking to you in English. They reply back in English, but when they notice that you can speak in Italian, they want to help you. So all these little finds that I've made in the past years have also been thanks to these locals in Italy who just stood and took the time to help me.

Katy

Amazing. How did you let Italian did you pick it up on your own? Did you start learning for an online program? How did you do it?

Ishita

So after my first trip, my first solo a trip from Perugia. When I came back from Umbria and Trieste and all these wonderful places, a lot of people were like, why don't you just start learning the language because you're so passionate about the culture and it will be so great. And I was really not in that head space. So I just searched online for some classes and saw that the Italian Embassy actually has so many of them. So the Italian embassy here in New Delhi, that's where I've learned my Italian from. I've stuck to courses where it was easy that time because you could physically just go and learn. Now it's just all virtual and it's a whole other game. But that's how I learned Italian. And I'm so grateful to my teachers who've sort of had faith in me because it's not an easy language, especially when you're just known Hindi and English your entire life. It's just a whole other world to know a Latin language. So that's how my journey has been.

Katy

Well, I think the fact that you know two languages very fluently, and I think you can hear how fluent you are in English is brilliant. Most of us can only speak one language. So I mean, absolute admiration of that. It's fantastic. It's amazing. Well done. Was there any other places you wanted to tell us about?

Ishita

The list is never ending, Katy, I think. But there are some places that I'd like to mention. Lago di Orta. Lake Orta I think you're going there and you're just so excited.

Katy

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It's my favorite. It's my favorite. I love it so much. Yeah.

Ishita

Wow. That's amazing. I mean, again, all these places, even though I didn't spend as much time, but I feel like certain places you just connect to. So I'd say Lago di Orta is one then places in Emilia Romagna. Palma is my favorite. I have a lovely friend there. She has a beautiful bed and breakfast just two minutes away from the center. So I'd love to just go and be there next time. My husband and I traveled for our honeymoon. It was just amazing. The kind of hospitality and the kind of delicious food that you have in Palma - it is just amazing. So that's one then in Puglia, I'd say Monopoli. I really like Monopoli. I really also like Polignano. I know people have mixed views about it because it's become so touristy but when the time I had gone, it was not as popular, I'd say, or it was not as crowded. I really like Polignano, and in general, I have a fascination for Sicily. I think that I feel like Sicily is very similar to Indian culture, to India in general. The whole of south, actually. I see a lot of similarities between Southern Italy and India, especially Puglia and Sicily in the two regions that I've been to. Next time, I know that it's going to be a trip to south.

Katy

What are some of the similarities between Italy and India that you've noticed?

Ishita

Oh, my God, there's so many. It's going to take a whole other podcast episode.

Katy

We can do another podcast, but just quickly, top three.

Ishita

Top three would be family oriented. Hugely family oriented. Even after decades of even if you're like 30 or 40, you're still living with your parents. It's very common in India as much as in Italy. Then we have the obsession for food and every region just saying that our food is better than yours. Also, this is like the third most important point is how diverse we are, how diverse we are in India and how diverse Italy regionally diverse, because every little town, commune, village has something that they're offering, and they think that that's the best. And in India, we have the same thing.

Katy

Yeah, I can see that totally. I mean, I haven't spent a lot of time in India, but I can see that connection between the food and the family and the pride of the place as well. I think that's coming through to me as well. So the next trip you'll go down south, is that right?

Ishita

Yes, definitely down south. I've been planning a trip to Campania for the longest time, and I think I tell this every time, either on my newsletter or just to people on Instagram or my followers, that my trip has just jinxed. It's never happened. And it's just three or four times. It's just not happen. Sometimes it's the weather or sometimes just things don't pan out the way you think, and I end up going somewhere else. So next time it's definitely Campania and maybe a region like Calabria, maybe Basilicata. I've been reading Karen Haid's books, and I've just got so attached to Calabria, and the people are just so lovely, so heartwarming reads. So I definitely love to go to either of these regions, but we'll see. It depends. Also the time you go in Italy. I mean, I don't want to go at a time when the weather is bad or it's not going to be as sunny and beautiful. But then I also have some places like Southern Tuscany, Northern Tuscany on my mind, the smaller towns like Pontremoli, Lucca. I haven't ever been there, so I'd love to go and explore these places.

Katy

You're going to fall in love with Lucca. Oh, my goodness. Well, that's definitely won't come. Now, I know it's been really tough for you these past two years because you haven't been able to go to your beloved Italy, but you've kept everything up with your newsletter and your blog and Instagram. So listeners, if your passion for Italy runs even a third as deep as Ishita's, you're going to love staying in touch with her. So how can everyone do that?

Ishita

So you can follow me on my Instagram, @Italophilia, and of course, I'm on Twitter, Facebook by the same name. And please also visit my website, which is ishitasood.com.

Katy

It's a beautiful website, and there's lots of discussions about books and movies and TV and just the feeling that you get when you're in Italy. And I think that's what really connected me to you in the start. And I really love to get together one day, I reckon we could have a really good - maybe at Coffee University, we could learn about coffee.

Ishita

Definitely I just an aperitivo anywhere in Italy.

Katy

Yeah, I mean, we can do that. That's fine. Thank you so much for joining us on and on Untold Italy today. I've just loved our chat and I do hope that we managed to connect in person somehow in our beloved Italy one day. Very soon.

Ishita

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I hope so, too. Grazie.

Katy

Don't you just love how through the magic of technology we can share our passions and stories with people in different pockets of the world? Recording this podcast with Ishita was so fun. I beamed into her home in Delhi and loved hearing the sounds of that city in the background as she shared her favorite Italian places and experiences.

What an incredible attitude and open mind she has to throw herself into Italian culture but I think we'll all agree, she is obviously feeling the love back in spades. I truly hope she and her husband are able to make it back soon. For those of us who feel the call of Italy deeply, these really have been a very difficult 2 years.

And I think if Ishita can transcribe Italian - her third language - it's an excellent motivator for me to really push myself in my own Italian studies. Wow. So impressive! I really a

If you'd like the details of the places Ishita mentioned we've put links and info about them into the episode show notes at untolditaly.com/119 including details of our Sicily tour departing in October where we'll take you to the beautiful Val di Noto that captured Ishita's and mine too! There are just a handful of spots left so be quick to book if you're interested

Thanks to all our subscribers 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.

On next week's episode, I'm going to share some common mistakes people make - me included - when they're planning their trip to Italy

But until then it's "ciao for now"