

Untold Italy Episode 121 - Islands of Venice

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 121.

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! Today's a wonderful day because today we're taking a trip to Venice. And this time we're going to places that most visitors don't see - mostly because they don't know what is possible. We're visiting some of the lesser known islands of Venice that are so important to the city's ecosystem - for food and wine and culture. You're going to discover Burano beyond the colorful houses, where to enjoy the best of Murano and the places to enjoy nature and go for a bike ride and where you can meet a flock of flamingoes.

Joining me today is food, culture and travel writer and Venetian resident Valeria Necchio. Valeria is a writer whose passion for her region is manifested in Her first book, simply titled Veneto, It's a recipe book and memoir on the food of her origins. I can't wait for you to meet Valeria and hear how that passion has only grown since the book was published in 2017

Katy

Benventa Valeria, welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Valeria

Thank you so much, Katy. It's great to be here today.

Katy

Oh, it's so wonderful to have you here. Everyone or most people that listen to this podcast know that Venice is my favorite. So I just need to know how is it today? How is beautiful Venice doing these days?

Valeria

Today, it's beautifully sunny after we had a few days of much-needed rain. It's still very chilly for the season, but, I mean, the sun is shining and it's gorgeous. The light is sparkly, so it's really beautiful, and there's a lot of excitement in the air.

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Katy

Why is that?

Valeria

Well, the city is finally getting ready for a few interesting and exciting happenings after a bit of a pause, a winter pause, as it always sort of like, goes into a bit of hibernation from December until Carnivale. And so we're getting ready for Homo Faber, which is this beautiful fair celebrating crafts and artisans in the city, which will take place this weekend. And then we'll also getting ready for the Art Biennale happening at the end of April. So lots of artsy things in the calendar.

Katy

That's so exciting - I love all those things about Venice - all the artisans and its a long tradition of crafts. It's a really amazing part about the city that maybe some people unfortunately miss. Anyway, Valeria, why don't you tell listeners a little bit about yourself and your story and your background and why you love Venice?

Valeria

Sure. So I was born and grew up in the countryside about half an hour from Venice, in a small town surrounded by fields. The landscape isn't very charming, meaning that it's quite flat, let's say, and it's very rural, but, I mean, it's still very close to the city and receives a lot of influences from Venice in terms of language and food, culture and culture in general, but also has the privilege of being, like I said, a countryside place. And so I grew up surrounded by nature. And my parents, my grandparents, they had gardens. And so, yeah, it was a very, like you say, bucolic upbringing. So then I studied at University in Padova. So I left my hometown to move to Padova, which is another really beautiful city in the region, a little less famous than Venice, but still very art-rich. And I studied languages there and cultural studies. All the while, I cultivated this passion for food and gastronomy. And so after my studies, I decided to move on to food studies. So then I moved to the Langhe region for a short spur, and I started food there, which sounds very idyllic, and it was and then short after that, I moved to London to work and gained some experience and have been working in the food industry and the hospitality industry ever since, in a variety of roles, but still with, like I said, like food and gastronomy at the center. And as the focus of my career. And so fast forward, let's say, with Brexit and the Pandemic, I decided to move back home. It was time after much like traveling and living in different places, it was time to return and regain some perspective on my roots. And so I decided to move back to Veneto during the third lockdown really. So in the winter of last year, and I elected Venice as the city where I wanted to settle. And it was my first time living actually in the city. And one year forward, it's been amazing and truly life-changing. And I feel like I finally made it home in a way. So I'm still very much in a honeymoon space with the city, and I hope that never ends. So, yeah, I've been living in Venice for about a year now, and it's been truly fantastic.

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Katy

Yeah, amazing. And I mean, I guess maybe not so busy as it would normally be, so you've had a really good opportunity to explore as a local. And just soak it all up and find those little corners that I guess - it may be a little bit crowded going forward, but it must be lovely just to have the city a little bit to yourself.

Valeria

Yeah, no, it was absolutely beautiful. I mean, I say that really selfishly because, of course, I mean, it was a moment in time that will probably never return. And so it felt quite special because of that. It also highlighted some aspects of the city that seemed very fragile - about residency and also about the issues that we all know that the city is facing. But as I said, it felt quite special to have the city to yourself and in a selfish way. And I know that with some people that had that experience, that experience, that about Venice, we sometimes still meet and, like, reminisce of that beautiful time, while well aware of the fact that it wasn't really sustainable and that probably a fair middle ground is what would be the best-case scenario for the city. But, yeah, it was a fantastic moment in time to also reflect on a variety of personal things. And so what I didn't mention is that throughout my entire career, I also cultivated writing and photography professionally, most especially food writing and travel writing. And I also did a lot of recipe development and got to publish a book about my region, which is called Veneto. And so returning here was also a way to regain some closeness with that part of me. And I wrote that book and that experience those things. And so it was truly important to be in the city when I decided to return. So, no, it's been fantastic.

Katy

Yeah. I'm so glad you mentioned your book, because it is a really important work of art, and you've put so much effort and love and care and attention into that. And for our listeners, they should definitely check it out if there's any interest at all in the food of the Veneto region, which you should really, because it is really unique and special in Italian cuisine and very different to a lot of the other regions that you may know about. Now, you talked about how special Venice is, but what really makes it special to you? What are those things that, apart from it being home, which is definitely home for you, but one of those really special, unique things that you just can't find anywhere else?

Valeria

I like the fact that it's all beautiful. In a way, it has this quaint beauty, however, sometimes feels very elusive. So of course we all see it in its shiny beauty, but it has some corners or some aspects of it that, as mentioned, look deeply fragile and are beautiful because of that, I can't find a better word, but it's a very decadent beauty in a way. And so as you stroll through it, you are constantly amazed by something, by a detail, by a shade, by a color, by a texture, an architectural element, by a sound. And then of course, the presence of water really

change the game even further. Like it just makes it even more complex because you have all of these reflections and how the light and the sound of the water interacts with the city. It just makes it so sensorial. And so, I don't know. I am a highly sensitive person in terms of being very stricken by these types of things, like light colors, etc. And so for me, going for a walk through the city, it's like a constant distraction. Like I'm constantly like I'm always taken by a detail.

Valeria

I don't know, it's very mesmerizing and ever inspiring. And this is what I love the most about the city. Also, the fact that, of course it has a lot of visitors, but the majority of it will be concentrated in certain parts of town. And then a large part of it will still be quiet. You'll still have corners of it to yourself to explore and to still hear the sounds of it like to still enjoy the colors, etc. And then last but not least, the fact that you have to go on foot everywhere. I am a walker. I love walking, and so I'm also always late. That made me a speed walker. So I walk really fast to get from point A to point B in the time that is right in my head. But actually that's not what Google Maps is telling me. But anyway, but the fact that you have to rely on yourself to get yourself places. And it's a lesson in resilience, and it's a lesson also in you don't have to bite more than you can chew, meaning you have to carry your grocery on foot, you have to do a million bridges to go places. So you have to really learn what you can handle, how your body interacts with your routine and with the city and with space. And also when it's quiet, you don't hear anything but the sound of your steps. And that's very interesting experience that I don't think you get anywhere else. Like the silence and the sound of your steps is something quite unique about them.

Katy

I know what you mean, actually, because if you can go away from the main areas, you definitely do get that totally different sensory experience. Yeah. It's so unusual. And if you haven't experienced it, I just feel sorry for you. I just want everyone to have that experience. Like, what are the other sounds? While you were talking, I was thinking, oh, it's just the sound when the gondolier - it's just a little slap on the water of the or just a little gentle movement. But it's a subtle sound, but it's there. And it's just unique to Venice. I'm vibing here - completely understand what you're saying, because they're the things that make me love Venice too. And it really saddens me that so many people visit the city and they misunderstand it because they don't have that experience. I can appreciate how that happens if you stay on the main path. This is why I wanted to ask you on this show today, Valeria, because I wanted you to share with our listeners how they can discover Venice away from the main tourist areas and how they can maybe explore a little beyond the main city as well. So we can do that. Can we help them

Valeria

Totally. Absolutely. That would be fantastic.

Katy

Okay. So maybe let's just talk about a little bit about the geography of Venice because that's I think it's a really key part of it because you have all these Islands. And anyway, so tell us about the geography and how that makes things interesting.

Valeria

Sure. Absolutely. So I think what's important to understand first and foremost, is that Venice doesn't exist without its lagoon, and vice versa. The lagoon doesn't exist without Venice. So the very reason why Venice exists in the way that it exists and has existed is because of the lagoon that surrounds it. So the main island, the city, like the one that you see is shaped like a fish, is actually at the center of this lagoon that then stretches north and south of the city and would have a cluster of islands dotting both the Northern and the Southern part. Actually, the very first settlement in the area, if we go back in time to Roman times, would be in the Northern part of the lagoon. So during the Barbarian invasions of Italy, when things were changing, the Roman Empire was collapsing, et cetera, people would be escaping the mainland and try to find refuge somewhere else. This happened very much in this area as people would escape from north of Venice and try to find a place to stay and escape these invasions in these Islands. The very first settlements we know of are in quite large island in Northern lagoon called Torcello. So Torcello still has, well besides a lot of archaeological remnants of this time. So, like, before the year 1000, it would also have a testimony of this really ancient settlement because it still has the oldest church ever built in the area and it's beautifully preserved. And it's a testimony because of how big it is of how many people actually lived in the area at the time. We're talking about tens of thousands of people. And today the island of Torcella only has eight people living there. This is quite mindblowing because then from Torcella because of a variety of geographical and emorphological reasons, like it was surrounded by rivers and so rivers would bring a lot of debris and slowly, as you say, like filling up the lagoon and creating marshlands, let's say. So that would cause some issues for fishing and for life on the island in general. So people moved south and they created a settlement in what is now Venice in this island called Rivo Alto, which rings a bell, if you know of Rialto, which is like the most famous bridge in Venice. So Rivo Alto actually comes after the first settlement in Torcello. And in these Islands in the Northern lagoon, which are now known as native Venice because they are it's where the whole civilization started. It's where people learned how to live in symbiosis with the lagoon and with the water. And really this whole experience sort of like set the standard for this civilization that wouldn't exist unless it learned to tame and live in a close relationship with water. And so revoir was done for a variety of reasons. The settlement that flourished the most and became what we know now as Venice. But it's still so beautiful and so interesting to take a boat and go and visit these Northern Islands because they put things in perspective and you really get a grasp of how everything started and why, if you spend enough time there, you'll get a sense of this complexity. So the Northern Islands, which I would recommend to visit are definitely Torcello and Mazzorbo, and of course, also Burano. But we'll open a parenthesis about Burano but Mazzorba and also Sant'Erasmus are islands that will instead make you perceive how Venice wouldn't survive without agriculture, right, because people have to eat something. And so

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Sant'Erasmus and Mazaorbo are islands that will shine for their agricultural and viticultural location. So you'll see, first of all, like so many local varieties of fruits and vegetables and grape varieties and hear the stories about these.

And they are so interesting. The most famous would be the artichoke. So the artichoke is the symbol of Venetian agriculture and you will see a lot of them on these islands and also get to taste them in season. But then there's also grapes and a lot of histories and a lot of interesting stories connected to this grape growing tradition. And if you taste these vegetables and fruits, you'll understand how the lagoon has also such an impact on flavors because it makes things just so much more flavorsome. And also how this combination also influences the local gastronomy, of course. So everything is very interconnected. And then Burano is gorgeous. Burano is an island of fishermen. So unlike Mazzorbo and Sant'Erasmus, which have mostly fields of vegetables, Burano is paved and has canals and beautiful, colorful houses densely populated with people and houses because it was an island of fishermen, as I said, and still very much it still preserves that vibe. There is still the cooperative fishermen. And these fishermen back in time would be some of the suppliers to the Rialto market. And so survived through that, through this industry of fisheries. Today, the island is, like, invaded, unfortunately, by day trippers. That's not necessarily a bad thing per se. But what's a bit sad is that the main reason for people to visit are the colorful houses, right, which are stunning like, the colored houses are beautiful. But I think the hope for locals and for people who love the Islands and who love Venice in general is that is not the main reason why you visit Burano. Like, there's so much under the surface, under that really shiny, beautifully bright, colorful surface. There is, as I said, fishing traditions to learn about, because that is what keeps that society together. And it's a very interesting, close community. So the fishing traditions are connected to the lace-making tradition, which is a really fine craft that's specific to the island. And the reason why that craft exists is because the wives of fishermen would be also the ones who were responsible for fixing the fishing nets. And then there's like food and wine tradition also to discover. There is so much. And so the hope is that in visiting this island, because, of course, it's a must-see - like, the visit goes beyond the mere strolling around and taking pictures in front of the green and the red and the purple and the yellow house. And this is a massive digression from what we were saying.

Valeria

So these are like some examples of the Northern Islands. And then the lagoon stretches in the south and will pretty much end in Chioggia which is the Southern extremity of the lagoon. A coastal town is a city in itself. It's known as Little Venice because it resembles Venice a little bit, but that's a different experience altogether. The lagoon is bordered/it's sort of divided from the Adriatic Sea by these long strips, which are also islands. One of them is called Pellestrina, and it's beautiful if you explore it by a bike, because you can cycle along, it's stunning. And then the Lido, of course, which is where Venetians go to the beach. And these then are connected, like, they are close to the Northern Peninsula, and those will be beaches

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as well. So it's a quite complicated, complex, interactive system that goes well beyond the main fish.

Katy

Yeah, absolutely. And I think if you take it back, like you said to the fact that the people, the original inhabitants, had to survive, so they needed their food and obviously they were very smart, so they needed wine as well. And there was different elements of the geography that sort of just pulls it together. You can see it as a whole ecosystem. And I think that's really special about it as well because it's almost like maybe when we live in big cities like London or Melbourne or wherever we are in the world, you can't actually feel or experience that because it's so big all around you. But in Venice, it's right there and it's still working and it still has to work in symbiosis with the lagoon, otherwise it won't work.

Valeria

Yeah, no, absolutely. You're so right. It's right in front of you because it's so small, like you say, and because nature is so close by, actually, you really get a sense of this close relationship where water meets the human element and nature also does and vice versa. And nothing works if these things don't interact. Yeah, no, it's quite special.

Katy

It is really special. All right. Let's just take a trip back to Burano because I really would like to help people understand that it is such a pretty place - we can't deny that it's definitely one for the 'Gram, as we say, Instagram. But I remember when we were there last time and I was wandering around and we were looking up and you can see this leaning tower. And I was like, oh, what is going on there? So it's not just Pisa that has a leaning tower. They actually have one on Burano as well, right?

Valeria

Yeah, no, totally. And if you're lucky enough, you'll stumble upon his local personality and he will insist on showing you his video in which he climbed the Leaning Bell tower with his bare hands. This is what I mean when I say that there's so much beyond the colorful houses. You have really interesting characters. There's like this fantastic leaning bell tower. There's a few in Venice as well. And it's very surprising. They're still standing, but they are. It's, of course, like a combination of the pool moving etc. Somehow Venice has to remain flexible, and that's the island as well. It has to remain flexible. It can't be concrete because it doesn't move with the water. And that's very true for all of the houses as well. It's really hard to find a house where the floor is actually completely straight. Most of them would be like leaning. And so if you drop a pen, it will end up to the other side of the street. So, yeah, you have to get used to it. It's not quite like being on a boat, but almost it's like this next step. It takes some getting used to.

Katy

Goodness. So what else is there about Burano? I love this character. I'm just going to go and seek him out when I am. When I go back. But what else can people seek out in Burano, which is a tiny little pocket island, isn't it? But it's about a 45 minutes boat ride to get there. So I think you can invest a bit more time than wandering around just taking photos.

Valeria

Absolutely. Like you said, it's about 45 boat ride, but back in the day, it used to be a four hour ride rowing. So a completely different world from Venice. You will see beyond the colors. You will also see just the very shape of the houses. There's no Grand Palace. They're all very humble homes, still very much inhabited by the local population, which is aging, but quite interesting. They're not sultry, they're very charming. So they're not isolated Islanders. The community is lively, very curious. So if you get to spend a little more than just half a day there, the very special moments in Burano would be in the morning and in the evening. But when everybody leaves and you get to see who actually lives there, those are the moments in which you'll get to interact with the locals at a deeper level. So if you stay at a local bar, you'll start to chat with the person next to you who's also having a spread, and you'll get to eavesdrop on their conversation, which can range from international politics to the price of sardines and back again. It's just utterly charming. And then, of course, there's still the local cooperative of fishermen, which does quite a few initiatives throughout the year. It used to be a really big cooperative because, as I mentioned, the island has a fishing location. So most of the people there used to be in fisheries in a way or another, but now only has about 20 members. So it's shrinking. It's shrinking for a variety of reasons. But if you get a chance to talk my most favorite of them, I shouldn't say that, but I love this person called Domenico. He's one of the youngest fishermen in Burano, and he has such a raw and deep knowledge of the lagoon. It's like, so deeply fascinating. And while he will tell you without being too technical, but having this very empirical experience about water and tides and just like the moon cycles and everything, he will tell you everything that you need to know about what is changing and why and how there's not very much fish left, how just like the morphology of the lagoon is changing, the temperature of the water, all of the seasons are changing. And so even like, as I mentioned, the empirical knowledge that these fishermen have that would be passed down by their father and their grandfather, because you learn by experience, would also need to change and adapt. But that's so hard when you work by trial and error in a way, or if everything that you've always known to be true is no longer true. So, for example, if you're used to the soft to shell crab season being from March to May, and all of a sudden it's not anymore because it's from February. All of your rituals shift, and all of your timing, like when you rest in the winter is no longer when you should be resting, because all of a sudden you should actually be out on a boat. And so it's like this rewiring that is deeply. It can be really shaking for the local community, I don't know. And you get a sense of this by like sitting down and chatting and asking questions. And so you have the local cooperative. You also have this fantastic group who are the rowers. So you have the rowing club, which is like the sport of Burano. You have no soccer, you have nothing of the like, you have rowing. And so the rowing club, you can take lessons, or you can just look at them as they seamlessly swing by

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and just like slide on the surface of the lagoon, like effortlessly rowing, like by themselves with these two rows.

Valeria

It's beautiful. It's quite meditative. And as I said, you can take lessons, go out with them and learn to grow. The local rowing style is called Volga alla Veneta. So it's quite different from other types of rowing because it's mostly done with just one oar. So it's like very different. Or you can also do kayaking. And that is a beautiful way to explore the lagoon in a slow and green way. Because another thing that I should mention is that the Northern lagoon is very fragile ecosystem. So in inviting people to visit, we also need to be wary of a lot of tourist boats or leisure boats going there because the movement of the waves can damage the ecosystem. So rowing would be a better option to explore in a much more sustainable and green and slow and as I said, very relaxing way to take in the nature and the rhythm of the place. And then at the end of that, you can enjoy some local delights so there's a few really nice restaurants. One of them is called Da Primo, which I love. They do really well with fish. Lovely people. And Al Gatto Nero is also very nice. So a lot of ways to take in the island from all perspectives, geographical ecosystem perspective, the sports perspective, historical and also gastronomy. Lots of things to see and taste and experience.

Katy

Amazing. Do they have any special dishes in Burano itself? Is it more like Venetian cuisine or have they got some hyper local dishes that you can try?

Valeria

They do. They have this local specialty called risotto di go, is that it's white fish that lives in the lagoon. And it's not very pretty or tasty per se because it's very bony. It's a bit fatty. So you wouldn't serve it as like a grilled fish. Say you wouldn't portion it, but it's fantastic when you use it to make stock to then cook your risotto in. So the local specialty is like this plain white risotto that looks like it's just like butter and cheese. But then you taste it and it has this beautifully delicate fish resort to taste. And it's absolutely delightful. And there's a couple of places that do it quite spectacularly when they do the mantecatura at the very end. So, like, when they emulsify the rice with all of the other ingredients, and so they make it jump really quite high and turn into the pan. If you get to experience that, that's quite striking. And the result of per se is very lovely. So I would recommend trying that. And then there's also local sweets called the buranelli, which are vanilla biscuits. They are not like shortbread. They're not quite as crumbly. They're a little bit more rustic. And, of course, their attachment to, A, the humble origin of the recipe, and B, the fact that these biscuits, which back in the day could have also been savory. So, like just basically plain bread and sweet and needed to last quite a few days as people would leave to go fishing at sea. But they are delicious and they are served at the end of a meal with your coffee or with, like a glass of Moscato or Malvasia. Yes, lovely, lovely stuff.

Katy

I'd like to try that risotto. Definitely and those biscuits. Oh, my goodness. This is what's beautiful about everything about Italy is you can get so hyper local and try these amazing things. And, you know, you might be lucky because it might not happen when you're there, but you would just have to go back and try and be there because you mentioned the softshell crab season as well, because that's one of the amazing Venetian delicacy. And that's a very short season, isn't it?

Valeria

It is, yeah. It's starting out now, and then it changes, as we said now with the changing in water temperatures, etc, it shifts. But let's say spring and fall would be the seasons when you find them. Yeah, they are the light.

Katy

I love them so much. Okay, then you just mentioned these vineyards, and I think maybe people wouldn't expect that in Venice that you would be making wine on the lagoon. So tell us again where that happens and what type of grapes do they grow and what's the wine like?

Valeria

Sure. So a huge chunk of Venice's tax income back in the day, back during the Serenissima age with the Doges, etc, came through wine exports and wine sales. So huge production, huge consumption of wine. You have a lot of streets in town there in the name of Calle de La Malvasia, Malvasia being a type of wine. And so that is an indication that would be where you'd find it. Find wine to drink. So most of the islands that have this agricultural location would have many hectares with wine. This tradition carried on through the centuries. But then something quite distressing happened somewhere like mid 1900s. So we had this very dramatic flooding, high tide in 1966, that sort of decimated, let's say the viticulture in the lagoon, because the plants were submerged by salty water for many days. And so that basically killed all the plants. And so after 1966, a lot of people that were working in agriculture and viticulture, sort of like retrained in something else, mostly glassmaking and other industries. And so a lot of these estates in the Northern Islands were abandoned and people started to produce wine in areas that were safer, so mostly in the mainland.

Valeria

But now we have a few projects that are rediscovering the viticultural location of these Islands, one of them is called Vennisa and it's located in the island of Mazzorbo. And so it's a project of agricultural rediscovery because they basically found a few plants of this local grape variety called Dorona, surviving in this beautiful garden, which belongs to this antiquarian that has her shop in front of the Torcello Church. So in front of the Torcello Church, there's this lady called Nicoletta, and she has an antique shop. And then she has this beautiful garden with statues, so you can see and in this garden you see some rows of

vineyards. And in there, these three plants that are close to disappearing. The grape varieties were found and from this project started. So now we have 4000 plants of Dorona growing in Mazzorbo, thriving. And from that there's this wine that's produced that's quite unique and like a true taste of what wine from the lagoon tastes like, which has a great stability. It's very concentrated and it's quite special. It's a very small production.

Valeria

And then there are other projects. One is called Orto and it's located in Sant'Erasmus. They are international grape varieties for the most part, but in that very place, they express themselves quite differently. And so you have a different wine experience from a different island that's also very interesting to try. And these wines you can find, of course, there by visiting Venissa or Orto but there are also a few wine bars in the city in town and a few restaurants that would have these wines there for you to try. And they're quite worth a try. They're very special.

Katy

Can you tell us a couple of those restaurants? I'm just very intrigued myself, taking notes. I would love to try that.

Valeria

Yeah. A favorite one is called Osteria San Marco. It's four Venetians that have decided to start this lovely local bistro. Their cuisine is contemporary, so you wouldn't find the classics necessarily, you wouldn't go there for that. But the food is astounding and they have a really excellent wine list. And on there you would find both bottles. So a fantastic location to try the food paired with these lovely wines. You would also find both of them in bacaro called Cantinone Gia Schiavi, which is a classic. It's located in Dorsoduro, not far from the Accademia, and that is a hot spot for aperitivo. It's a fantastic you'd find a mixed crowd of, like, locals, students, people coming for art exhibits, visitors - it's like it's a nice blend, a really fantastic vibe, and you would find everything from the small umbra, which is like the small goblet of wine (house wine) for one €1, to very refined pours from the region and beyond, and also bottles to take home, including these two that I mentioned.

Katy

So fascinating. I really love this whole rediscovery of wine that's happening Italy. I don't know if you know it. In Milan, they've got Da Vinci's Vineyard and they're propagating the vines that they found from when he lived opposite Santa Maria delle Grazie there. And also in Pompeii, they're doing it as well. And I just think it's really fascinating and quite special to be able to try those wines when you're there. So thank you for sharing that with us. It's really lovely. Now, you haven't mentioned Murano, and I'm going to ask you why? Because I think most people, when they go to Venice, they go to Burano and Murano. And Murano is obviously the

island that's known for glass blowing. And maybe it's become a little bit like a factory, hasn't it? That one, unfortunately. But I'm happy to hear differently. If that's not the case.

Valeria

I don't have a very different experience from what you just said. I mean, there is a lot of that, unfortunately, and possibly among all of the islands, it's been the one that has struggled the most to reinvent itself, in a way, though, it doesn't have to reinvent itself completely. But it has a lot of that factory feeling. However, there are still some fantastic projects happening on the island and beautiful ateliers of glass blowing that are worth the visit because they're authentic and they are carried out by very passionate people. If you visit Murano, I would say visit these places as opposed to just strolling past and like, buying a little glass figurine from the first place that you stumble upon, because there are a lot of - it's hard to discern what's authentic from what it's not. So like, by going to Murano with a clear goal and objective in your head, then you know that you would have a beautiful experience of the island beyond everything else that's thrown in the mix. So there's so many fantastic workshops there to visit. One of them is Micheluzzi Glass. It's a project that's been started by two sisters. I mean, I'll mention a few, but there are others, of course. Micheluzzi Glass is this project that's been started by two sisters who come from a glass making family, but then decided to do other things with their lives for a long time. So they moved abroad. They worked in retail and fashion etc. And then, like many stories that you'd hear when you start digging, like, they decided to return and those still carrying on the family tradition to do something different and on their own. And so they started their own collection with bringing in all of the inspirations that they've collected through their travels and through their experience. And so their pieces are very inspired and very genuine and quite different. So this is a beautiful place to do that. There's also this lovely place called Punta Conterie, which is this like multifunctional space where you would have a bit of a glass museum collecting the best pieces from some of the best workshops in Murano. And then there's like a florist that's beautiful and then a fantastic terrace cafe and that serves really delicious food. So that's a really lovely experience of Murano, like going to a beautiful Atelier, visiting this little museum and then just enjoying the fact that it is an island facing the open lagoon and on the other side facing the main city, you see all of these domes, you see the bell towers. So I feel that that's probably a more enjoyable experience of Murano.

Katy

I love it. Go with a plan. Go with a special plan. But I think everyone thinks I'm going to go and do this and then they get off the Vaporetto and they go and they're like hit by so many choices. So, yeah, I think it's a great suggestion is to go with a plan and to discover things that way. Any other Islands that you particularly wanted to tell us about?

Valeria

Yes. So I've mentioned Sant'Erasmus because of the vegetables. And it's also really nice to just like go and lounge on a Sunday on a quasi beach because it's not really a beach. It's like

forest. Like a little forest with a little patch of land that is not even very sandy. However, the locals love it for a Sunday, leisure time on a sunny day. So Sant'Erasmus is really worth exploring if you just want to leave the crowds of the city behind and just like take a moment for yourself and just chill.

Valeria

Pellestrina, which I quickly mentioned is also beautiful. It would be south of Venice, so southern lagoon. You get there by first arriving to Lido and then taking this bus. Or you can cycle, but you can also take a bus that will take you all along the Lido. So you'll see the beautiful Art Noveua and Liberty buildings and then this bus goes onto the ferry. So you'll do the ferry ride, which is beautiful and you'll get to Pellestrina. It sounds like a stretch, but it doesn't take that long, actually - in a couple of hours you're there and then you'll have the entire day to yourself. It's a very charming and quaint island with a few really nice places to eat and you can stroll leisurely and it's really lovely.

Katy

So I'm just actually looking at it on the map and it's just like a tiny little strip. Yeah, it's tiny. Wow. And nobody goes there.

Valeria

No, because it takes a day trip. So of course, if you only spend two or three days in Venice or if you just come for the day. So, of course, it makes it quite hard to visit Pellestrina, but it's beautiful. Yeah. These at the moment are my favorite, but they shift. It's always changing as I discover new things. Then another one becomes my favorite, and it's never ending. It's a cycle.

Katy

Yeah. And, I mean, I think there's well over 100 Islands in the lagoon, so you've got a long way to go to discover them all. Probably take a lifetime. One really special memory that I have from a trip that we did in 2017 as we stayed on the mainland and we experienced that out on the lagoon with the Dolomites in the background that you can't really see when you're in the city, the mountains rising in the background, and it's just a beautiful day. We hired electric boats. You can't go fast.

Katy

No.

Valeria

You have to just kind of relax and enjoy the beautiful nature all around. And at that point, the man at the boat place said that there were flamingos in the lagoon, and I didn't know

that. So beautiful nature right on your doorstep, not just these incredible art city that will wow you on every corner, but it's also beautiful nature everywhere.

Valeria

Yeah. No, absolutely. You see them right now, they tend to go and then come back. But right now there's a colony that's staying that's remaining because it found the perfect habitat. And so it's not uncommon to see them, like you say, in a Northern lagoon, if you go very slowly and on an electric boat or rowing and yeah, it's mesmerizing.

Katy

So it's one of our favorite days. And then we actually from that side to get to Burano was actually really easy because no one was going on that ferry. It was just us because we were going a different way to most people. And so it was a beautiful approach, actually, in there as well. It's lovely. Valeria, your passion for Venice is so inspiring. And goodness knows, we need so many people to champion what is special and unique about your city. How can our listeners follow you and your work and get an insight into daily Venetian life when they can't be there?

Valeria

I have an Instagram, of course, where I share most of my daily impressions of Venice, some tips, some secret findings, and everything that I experience I usually put on there. And so my Instagram is at @valerianecchio - at my name and surname and I'd love for people to follow me there. I'd love for everybody to come and join the conversation. And so we can keep talking about Venice and what people love and share impressions. And then I have a website, which is valerianecchio.com and on there you'd find links to articles to explore further the conversation. I write a lot about Venice, of course, Venice food, culture, geography and so people can find some links to articles on my website. And there are also links to my book and where to find it, which is wherever books are sold. So yeah, that's pretty much it.

Katy

And of course we will share all of those in the show notes for everyone as well. Grazie Valeria. Venice has fascinated me since I first heard about your magical city, built on water and I so appreciate you sharing more of its district with our listeners on Untold Italy. Thank you.

Valeria

Thank you. It was fantastic. Thank you so much. Katy.

Katy

Venice has always captivated me but after hearing Valeria talk about this beloved city I yearn for it even more. How beautifully she described the scenes of La Serenissima, the small moments or vignettes that make it so special.

There's no doubt Valeria has a keen eye and it's not only her words but her photography is simply beautiful too. I simply love checking in with her on Instagram to see what treasures she has uncovered. These treasures will be in focus during a four day retreat she is hosting this November with Ita; y Segreta focused on the food and artisans of Venice. You'll find more information about the retreat on her website at valerianecchio.com

All the details of places Valeria mentioned are in the show notes at untolditaly.com/121 for episode 121 as well as how to contact her if you're interested in joining.

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.

But until then it's "ciao for now"