

Untold Italy Episode 126 - What is an Agriturismo? (and why you should stay in one)

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 126.

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, I hope you're all doing well. Today we're heading to the Italian countryside to learn all about agriturismi which are rather loosely translated as farmstays but can encompass some rather luxurious settings as we'll learn. This unique form of accommodation is not well known outside of Europe but it's beloved by Italians and Europeans alike.

Joining me today are Sarah and Salvatore from La Cuccagna, a stunning property in the heart of Umbria not far from Perugia where fireflies dance at dusk in the nearby forest in summer and heading on a truffle hunt is a normal part of life, in other words, not a tourist experience.

I've invited Sarah and Sal onto the show to share with you all the very many good reasons you should plan to stay in an agriturismo and also why their property in Umbria is so special. I've no doubt you'll be booking your agriturismo stays just as we have for your next trip to Italy So, Andiamo!, let's get started

Katy

Benvenuti, Sarah, and Salvatore, welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Sarah

Buongiorno Katy. Thank you very much for having us.

Salvatore

Thank you very much for inviting us on your podcast.

Katy

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I'm so excited to have you here. I thank you so much for joining us from the beautiful Hills of Umbria today. So I'm wondering, Sarah, is everything in full Bloom for Spring?

Sarah

Yes, I'm looking out the window now. A really beautiful, clear, sunny sky. We're lucky to have about a 50 kilometer view here from on top of our hill. So I'm looking out on the hillsides, which are bursting into color at this time of year. Our fruit trees are blossoming and lots of the wild flowers along the edge of the road are beginning to burst into life, too.

Katy

That sounds absolutely beautiful. Where exactly is your property, Sarah?

Sarah

So we're in Umbria, as you said. Not many people have heard of Umbria, and even if they have, they're not overly familiar with places in it. But Perugia is the capital of Umbria. And from our hilltop, we look out across the valleys over to Perugia. In fact, we can see the rooftops of the main street and the church spires in the distance. But we're actually as the crow flies, we're halfway between Gubbio and Perugia. Gubbio is the local council that we're attached to, so although neither of us are indigenous, we consider ourselves Eugubian now.

Katy

All right, how did you end up you said you're not indigenous. How did you end up in that area? Can you tell us your story? And how did you come to be there? Opening an agriturismo.

Sarah

So I'm English and Sal is Italian, we actually met in England. Sal was living there for a while, and people always expect a sort of romantic story, something like star cross lovers in a piazza in Florence, but in fact, it was far more rustic than that. We met on the Marlborough Downs in Wiltshire. Sal was an instructor at the Paragliding School where I was learning to fly. And one day we were sitting on the hillside waiting for the wind to pick up, and we got talking about traveling and discovered our mutual passion for travel. And it all kind of went from there, really. We'd both done extensive traveling before we'd met each other, and we've had lots of exciting adventures ever since. And one of the things that we enjoyed most about our travel was always getting off the beaten track and meeting the locals, many of whom welcomed us into their homes or shown us places where we wouldn't find in guidebooks. And when we got tired of corporate life, we decided that we wanted to have a complete lifestyle change and do something like that ourselves. And Sal has farming in his blood. He comes from a farming family, so it kind of made sense to look for somewhere where we could set up our own farm and try and be as sustainable as possible. And open our home to guests and try to offer them that same experience, those same real experiences. We originally started our

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search for somewhere in Tuscany because I was being a bit of a snob about Italy. But one day, Sal said to me, "Come on, let's nip across into Umbria and have a look in Umbria". And I sort of went a little bit like a spoilt child, really thinking, I'm not going to like this. But in fact, I couldn't help it. I fell in love with Umbria from the first moment Sal took me to this area, and we haven't looked back since. And that day, that first day that we came to Umbria was the day that we found La Cuccagna. And it was perfect. The most extraordinary views I'd ever seen in Italy. So therefore, nature doing a lot of the work for us. And Sal, with his vision and creativity, has transformed what was effectively a pile of stones into what we consider quite an extraordinary little farm.

Katy

Unfortunately, I've only seen the photos, but it absolutely looks magnificent and just a beautiful place. I've no doubt. I can only imagine that you fell in love with it at first sight. I think that is a really romantic story, actually. I think whenever you resist something, it's kind of like a push pull effect, isn't there? So the resistance creates some sort of pressure, and then there you are - in heaven.

Sarah

It was one of life's very pleasant surprises.

Katy

And how long have you been there?

Sarah

Sal, how long have we been here now? Almost 20 years.

Salvatore

17. Almost 18 years, yes.

Katy

Amazing. And you since you had a daughter and you've fully settled in Umbria, now, right.

Salvatore

Typically, when you start a project like that, not expected - here comes the child. I have to say, for us, it's been great to have experience to do it.

Sarah

We didn't know that we were going to have a family when we started everything here in Italy, but when we did, I mean, there has never been a single time when we've had to think

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'Where's best to bring up our child?' For us, Rose has grown up in paradise, really. And during term time, she'd disagree, but in summer holidays, she'd absolutely agree.

Katy

Okay, so today I really wanted to get you guys onto the show, because one of the things that I'm really passionate about sharing is the different types of places you can stay in Italy and what different experiences they can bring you. And so La Cuccagna is an Agriturismo, and that's a special farm where people can stay. It's really one of my favorite things to do when I'm in Italy, stay in Agriturismo. In fact, most of the accommodation we're staying in our upcoming trip is at Agriturismo because it's such a special experience and you really get to know the area that you're staying in and all of that. But I'm not going to talk too much about it. I'm going to hand it over to you guys to really explain to everyone what is an Agriturismo so that they can get an idea from you who actually run one.

Salvatore

Yes. And Agriturismo. There are many ways I can speak of an Agriturismo but it was a simple idea to have a farmer to make a bit of extra money. Because of the last 20 years, 30 years farming has been very difficult. We can turn into something really special. I mean, an Agriturismo now is not just the place to stay and you can find Agriturismo from all levels - from the one star to five stars but what makes everything so special is what you get when you get there you don't just get a stay. Like I said, it's the fact that you connect with the farming life of that Agriturismo. You can actually like, you don't have to, but you can find out what the farm or the farmer does. You can actually like some places like ours, you can go in. I mean, during our olive season, like when we pick the olives we have always people that come so they can actually see the cycle of how we make olive oil. We pick during the morning, we have a nice lunch in the olive groves and then in the afternoon we go to the frantoio which is oil press and we make some oil and I think the whole experience is great because it makes a difference in going into a shop and picking up like a bottle from the shelf - than actually seeing how it's made and in our case it's olive oil, olives and chestnuts and few other things but depending on it can be anything from flour, wine and so it is a way to actually connect to the farming world.

Katy

That's such a simple but really unique idea, isn't it? And it's helping lots of people really - it's helping the farmers and it's helping tourists and visitors see a different part of Italy. I think it's just absolutely really special and I want to really make sure people understand it's not like staying in a barn necessarily. I mean, you can get ones like that.

Salvatore

You can actually get - there are one or two - there are not many left? But they still have some but a lot of places like ours or others, they are the same as a four or five star hotel like you

have the same experience you go there, like you have a very good comfortable room with all the amenities and the services, the pool, sauna and everything else but on the same token you can actually have the connection with the farming like we have a vegetable patch where you can see where all the fruits and veg comes from, how we farm it we also are like an organic farm so we're very strong on organic products - not just because it's better products but because it's much better for the environment and that's one thing that most Agroturismo are like. Take very seriously the fact that we are sort of looking after the environment around us and we know the environment around us very well and that's another way for the tourists to know they are aware, like into what's happening there and what's the issue that there is. And it's a way of learning as well how we can be more responsible tourists as well, because it's not just about going somewhere, seeing something and going home.

Salvatore

I think for me that I love traveling, like, for me, learning how, where I'm going, what sort of culture it is, how do people live and what they do? I think it's one of the most important things for their takeaway from a trip. I mean, it's nice to go and see churches, monuments and cities, but I always like to know how people are and what they do and how they live.

Katy

Yeah, absolutely. Look at you guys. It actually inspired a whole lifestyle change, really, and a whole lifetime of work and play and everything. I think it's amazing. Now, apart from olives, did you say you have chestnuts as well on your farm?

Salvatore

We do olives and vegetables in Umbria, but down South, I have a family part of the farm which is chestnuts, and we do chestnuts as well in October. So I normally like it sometimes take groups as well that they can actually come and experience the same things like with the olives but with the chestnuts.

Katy

Castania, I love them delicious. And what sort of vegetables do you grow there?

Salvatore

We grow the usual vegetables. We grow mainly like tomato, peppers, aubergines, courgettes, cucumbers, potatoes

Sarah

Onions, garlic.

Salvatore

Most of the products that we use like that's another thing as well. In Agriturismo, 85%, in Umbria, an Agriturismo has to use at least 85% of product coming from the area. We cannot go and shop into the big supermarket, which I think is right. We need to use products from farming. And most of the times we use our olive oil, our vegetables, which can sustain us from June to October. And before that we have other farmers that actually produce other products which we can use in our kitchen, which I think is very important when guest comes, because other things, we have accommodation with kitchens, so they can actually cook themselves and they have, like, free to rummage in the vegetable patch. They can go and pick their own tomatoes, their own courgette and peppers and things like that. And one thing that we always hear is that they are so much different than the ones right from the supermarket.

Katy

Absolutely. There's nothing better than a fresh tomato that's been ripened in the sun. Just a sprinkle of salt, drizzle of olive oil. Delicious. I could just eat that.

Sarah

But also lots of fruit. We've got a lot of different fruit trees too, though. We've got apricots and peaches and figs and plums and strawberries and we grow melons as well in the vegetable patch. So I think the other thing that's important, like Sal has been saying about the Agriturismo is everything is from the area, seasonal and from the area. So you're getting that true experience of this region, because one of the things that makes Italy so rich is the diversity between the regions so when guests come to an agriturismo, they're really getting to appreciate the taste and flavors of that specific region. And I think that's a really nice experience. And guests seem to really appreciate that.

Katy

Well, I know I do. What I would have to say is that some Agriturismi have like full-blown restaurants. They can have quite big, large dining rooms. We've stayed in one really big one in Sicily, where they had a wine cellar and a big restaurant there, but there's various levels of catering that's available. And it's on a spectrum, really, isn't it? And what do you guys offer at your agriturismo?

Salvatore

We are very small. We like to take care of our customers individually, so we only have maximum 12/13 people staying at the same time. So we really like to do simple dinner, which is all eating together and it's more like a family meal. And actually the restaurant experience, we also like, we have a wood oven, so we tend to use that a lot to make her own pizza from Campania.

Sarah

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So in other words it's good for pizza.

Katy

Pizza is on the menu at La Cuccagna. I love it. And obviously breakfast as well, because I think most Agriturismo offer breakfast.

Salvatore

Yes, 99.9% of Agriturismo offer breakfast. It goes without saying.

Sarah

Well, some agriturismo only have self-catering accommodation, but, yeah, mostly. But we offer breakfast, it's included with us, but our catering is occasional. So we don't offer catering every night. But in a way, that's what makes it special when we do.

Katy

Yeah, everyone has to turn up on pizza night. I think that's like the way to go.

Salvatore

Definitely, at the moment we've got people that just come to stay with us so they can eat our pizza.

Katy

Well, I don't know. I think I'm interested in the apricot tree. That's my absolute favorite fruit. So maybe we can just distill it down is like, people coming from maybe the US, Australia, the UK, they never heard of an agriturismo and they didn't really fully appreciate what it was. And they thought, well, I can stay in a hotel or I can stay in a bed and breakfast. Tell us why we should stay in agriturismo what is the essence of it? Why would you choose it?

Salvatore

Because you can stay in a hotel and you get a very good service. But what we can offer more than experience. We don't just do farming. We actually like, show how farming is done. Also, we tend to have a philosophy of life, which is slightly different. We really like, enjoy the countryside. So we love the countryside and we tend to care, like, about the countryside so much that we spend a lot of time outside caring for our garden. So you certainly will have like very good experience in quiet, reserved, beautiful places.

Sarah

I think it's a connection with the land and the people that you wouldn't be able to get. If you weren't staying at an agriturismo, it would be impossible to find and have that connection and

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that experience, that authenticity. You wouldn't get that from a normal hotel or B and B, and by their very natures agriturismo are in the countryside because you don't get farms in the middle of a historic center.

Katy

Yeah. And I think people, when they think of Italy, I think a lot of people are really focused on their first visit, maybe to some of these big areas like Rome, Florence, Venice, Amalfi Coast, and Cinque Terre. And it's really these tiny little spots on the fringes of everything - and right in the middle, you've got these whole culture and lifestyle that's happening in small towns, in the countryside. and I think that's what people think of as the Italy that they want to see. And that's what Agriturismo is really offering you - is that you can actually go and be part of that.

Sarah

Exactly like you said, most definitely on people's first time in Italy, they will ordinarily go to Venice, Florence, Rome, a few other places. But when you go to Rome, Rome is amazing. It's stunning. Definitely got to go to Rome at some point. But Rome isn't Italy. It's Rome. It's a very different experience. So Agriturismo really allows you to understand what real Italy is all about. And like, say, when you stay in these little farms in the countryside on the fringes of all these, Italy is just full of thousands of beautiful little towns and villages, all of which have their own Sagres and Festas. And by staying in an agriturismo, you're more likely to find out about those and be involved in those and go to those, which is a completely different experience than going and looking at art in an art gallery in Florence. Completely contrasting experiences.

Salvatore

I like to think of an agriturismo as like a portal to the local culture.

Sarah

Exactly.

Salvatore

I mean, I'm very biased, but coming to Gubbio, what the culture that you will be actually like being part of, because Gubbio is such a special place that I think everybody at least once in their life, they should actually come and experience it and what it has to offer. And what a strong culture like, which is over 140 years old.

Sarah

It is. It's one of the oldest cities. It's one of the oldest cities in Italy. And in fact, you're right. How you put that about a portal. That's what I was when I was thinking about this earlier. I

was thinking that when people come and stay with us, for example, I like to think of it as a window providing them a window into our life and our lifestyle and real Italian country living.

Katy

Well, it does sound pretty magical. I think that it's really attractive to a lot of people now, including myself, is that we live these very busy lives, and sometimes we don't even stop to recognize the seasons or the changes in what's happening around us. But I think when you visit the countryside in Italy and you go and you see how everything is seasonal and it moves with a rhythm of nature that you can suddenly become a little bit more at peace with yourself and understand what is important, which is maybe not all the rushing around, but maybe just sitting back and noticing what's going on around you and appreciating the people that are working with you to enjoy it.

Sarah

Yes, I guess we've been so immersed in life here now for almost 20 years, that what you've just said. We take it for granted because we are living that every day. But guests always say to us how quiet and peaceful it is here. And of course, we're hearing a donkey bray or birds crowing or whatever, or the crickets buzzing in the summer and we're thinking we can hear all sorts of sounds and things. But compared to everybody that on the treadmill of life, they come here and they don't hear the sounds of the city and stress and traffic and they say, oh my God, the stars. We can see the stars because of course there's no light pollution because we're in the countryside.

Salvatore

It'd difficult to explain, but walking the streets of an old medieval town - in Umbria pretty much every city is medieval or it's got part of it, which is got medieval walls or like sort of houses. They're still like in the same style as it was 5000 years ago. But it's not just that - it's all beautiful. Everything is just energy that every single city has. At different time of the year, the buzzing of the people, like getting on with their life, and sometimes an Agriturismo is a way of having connection to that. The first Sunday of May, we all going to go like Gubbio is about the city of 30,000 people and about 25,000 will go up the mountain behind to pick the Ceri - the annual festival of the Ceri that we have. The 15th May.

Sarah

Ceri aren't fruit. Ceri means something very specific.

Salvatore

We have this big medieval festival like the 15th and the 15th morning, like hearing the drum going to the city, waking everybody up in the city so that you can get ready to go and do the parades. And it's just incredible. And sometimes if you just go to a place and you just stay

and, okay, you might eat well, but you might miss the essence of what a place is. And I think that would be a real shame. I think you can learn so much and enjoy so much with these different experiences that are very far to find in between life. Like you said, we're always busy running our life and chasing all the things that we need to do all our daily chores and sometimes just relaxing, laying back and having somebody introduce us to a different way, different culture, just like recharge our battery and give us energy to go back home and just think, oh great, this was a great holiday. I want to do so much. Coming back from a holiday and feeling this in yourself that you want to do something. I think it's a great way - that means you've learned something. That means something has inspired you. And for me, life and inspiration is very important.

Katy

I couldn't agree more. And this is a story that comes up a little bit often on this podcast, but I do have a really important experience. When I stumbled on the saga actually just by accident, and it really changed my whole perception of how to travel initially. And that was maybe I've been to Italy quite a few times already before that and I loved it, but at this something changed in me that I really felt really a deeper connection to the country and countryside and just how people were connecting with each other and enjoying the fruits of their labor and just in a very simple and genuine way. And I really loved it. So yeah, I couldn't agree with you more. I think it is really special and I would love everyone to experience this for themselves. So now, Sarah, how can we find agriturismo for a start, and what should we look for when we find one? It seems to be quite a difficult thing to find a good Agriturismo.

Sarah

Okay, so the first thing we need to look for is the name La Cuccagna. But no, Italy has a site called agriturismo.it That's a very good place to start. And I think most agriturismo are listed on the site. So that would be a very good place to start. And like all of these websites these days, you can filter your search and put your dates in and things like this in your region. But it's a bit like when you're choosing any kind of accommodation, really, you'll have your list of things that you will want, and I guess it's filtering through. Agriturismo actually have a sort of rating system, that's sunflowers. Okay, one to no stars, but one to five sunflowers, although the whole system is not really a very reliable benchmark. So perhaps don't look at the sunflowers. I think these days, with everything that you do in life, there's always reviews you need to read between the lines on a bit, on the reviews. But I think that from the reviews you can really pick out, there are lots of common themes in our reviews. And I can tell when somebody inquires with us, I can tell that they've read our reviews because they ask for specific things.

Sarah

Can we have pizza tonight? Can we go truffle hunting? Can we have a pasta-making course? And they specifically refer to Salvatore's Pizza etc. So I think that even if you don't know what you're looking for, when you read people's reviews and they talk about what they did, it will

give you an idea of perhaps what you then want to get out of it. Because sometimes, like you say, people don't know what they're looking for. But then when they hear people talk about what they liked best, about their stay, they're like, "ah yes, I want that too". But as I said, the websites generally these days do offer good filters. But I think that if you really want to connect with the land and the people, as we've been talking about, I think it's important to perhaps search on activities and how interactive hosts are with their guests. For example, some people very specifically know what they're looking for. As Sal said before, we have people that come on olive picking holidays. So if olives is something that takes your fancy, then you obviously need to be looking in a region, and for Agriturismo most which are olive farms. But if you have got small children, lots of families want Agriturismo where their children can go and pet the donkeys and the goats and these sorts of things. So it's looking to see whether the Agriturismo may have what you want to get out of your experience.

Katy

Sometimes when people are reading reviews, they're looking for the negative things and what I really love about what you just said then, Sarah is that you're actually saying, oh no, this is all the opportunities that you have when you want to stay somewhere. I think that's a really great way of looking at it.

Sarah

Yes. And I think you generally get a vibe from a farm of how the hosts are about how people do write reviews, because if guests are just talking about the rooms, then it means they haven't really had much participation in the farm and with the hosts. And also when people - on agriturismo.it, each agriturismo has their own page and you have the opportunity to write a bit about your farm and what you offer. You can generally get a feeling for how warm and welcoming people are and the kind of experience you might get at that agriturismo. For the things which are easy to put a tick in a box. It's easy to just filter on place with a pool, place with self-catering, child friendly. Everywhere has these sorts of filters, but agriturismo.it is definitely a good place to start.

Katy

What you'll find there is lots of reviews from people all over Europe because it's nothing new in Europe, in fact, so the Germans and the Dutch, they're onto it. They know that this is a great way to see Italy and all of that. And I think it's our English-speaking travelers that maybe don't have the experience of agriturismo so much. And that's really why I wanted to talk to you about it today, because it is such a special way of seeing the countryside.

Sarah

One of the very important things I know we're going a bit back to the beginning again, but one of the very important things about agriturismo is that - in Italy, is that they are very heavily regulated, so they have to follow very strict rules. You can't just say, right, I'm going to be an

agriturismo. You've got to be a certain type of farm. Yeah, you can't just say I've got a vegetable patch, therefore, I'm an agriturismo. You've got to meet very specific and demanding criteria, like Sal was talking about before in, Umbria, 85% of anything that you're going to eat or drink X percent has to come from your farm, but then the rest has to come from local farmers. It can't be from any old shop. Every bit of raw ingredients. So flour needs to be milled from a flour where wheat is grown in Umbria, and it's been milled by a certain type of farm. So when you're looking at agriturismi, you're already getting a level of - even before you've chosen which one - you should be getting a guarantee of that kind of experience. Just by the very nature of the regulations around Agriturismi.

Katy

Now I'm wondering if there's an inspector.

Sarah

Yes.

Katy

Do they have a little sunflower badge so, you know they're coming.

Sarah

They definitely don't tell you they're coming.

Katy

That must be a bit nerve-wracking. When they show up.

Salvatore

They just come and check. The things are sort of done as they should be. And to be honest, we always welcome this check. We think that one way to keep things the way they should go, they should run is by doing checks. So we have it again. We have somebody like we have the Forest Department coming or like someone else to come, and they just come and if you're doing what you're doing, they just have a pleasant conversation with you and they go away. And they I will see you sometime in the future.

Katy

Yeah. No, I think it's really I was just joking. I think it's lovely that standard is maintained because like you said at the start, it's a really simple idea, but I can see how it could quickly get out of hand if it wasn't sort of kept in. And it sort of makes it more special, I think. Now tell me, I really want to hear from both of you. What makes your Agriturismo La Cuccagna so very special?

Sarah

Well, I say this from what our guests have told us, but our guests tell us that it's us that make La Cuccagna special, in the fact that Sal and I, we said tidbits of this throughout this conversation, but for us, this is first and foremost our home. So when guests come here, we're welcoming them into our home. What's really important to Sal and I is the land and the locals and being as sustainable as possible and having as little negative impact on the world around us. So when people come to us, what we give them, apart from a warm welcome, which we start that welcome from the moment they get out of the car in the car park, and we greet them and we bring them into our guest dining room and offer them a drink and check-in. From that first moment, we're there. If they would like it, to offer suggestions and tips and advice and guidance to make reservations, to give them the best possible experience, not just of staying here while they're on our property, but also for enjoying everything there is to enjoy in the local area. For example, just last week we opened for the 2022 season and one of our guests was a lovely American family. And they said to us on the last day that they've never been anywhere where the hosts have been so helpful and they felt like they were part of everything that was going on here. And we get that a lot and we never really understand that because it's - for us, it's just part of being a good host. We know the area and we want to share with people everything that there is to love about it and there is a lot to love about it. We have some guests that come every year. We have some guests which come twice a year, every year, and we're still finding them new and different things to enjoy each time, as well as lots of things that they like to come and experience again and again. And because we really like getting off the beaten track and finding hidden gems. And we also like sharing our business and our guests with the locals around us. For example, there are lots of companies out there which offer lots of activities and experiences on a commercial level and at a huge cost. For example, truffle hunting. Generally, people pay about €300 to go truffle hunting. Well, we've got a couple of local neighbors who are only too happy if they're going out truffle hunting, and some guests want to join in that it's 10th of the cost and the guests love it because it is a completely real experience. It's nothing staged. What people have from staying at La Cuccagna is us and on our knowledge, and it's never too much trouble to make a reservation or whatever the guests need from us. We often have a chat over a glass of wine on the terrace in the evening when the sun's setting and the fireflies are buzzing around and the crickets are humming. And it's not just what we can offer our guests as well. For us, we travel through our guests and we love meeting interesting people and we always do have really interesting guests. Not only are we a window for them into, Umbrian, living, but also we get this amazing perspective from all sorts of people from all over the world. And when we're talking at the very beginning about our daughter Rosa, it's one of the amazing things that she's had. She's had such a global upbringing, yet she lives in the middle of nowhere, on top of a hill.

Salvatore

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Our moto is - people come and guests, they go away as friends. And we made so many friends, like in the last 10/15 years.

Katy

Yeah, it's so beautiful. And I think, Sarah, in a way, you're being a little bit British and being a bit humble, but I think it does make it extra special when you've got that local connection. And apart from that, we've talked about all the experiences that you can have there. But not only that, you can tell you put so much love and attention into the property itself because it's absolutely stunning. And just think everyone should go into the website and have a little read of what's going on at La Cuccagna because it is really a stunning property. And so you get everything. You get this beautiful scenery, you get the local connection, and you get Salvatore's pizza.

Sarah

You do. Yeah. And Sal is constantly maintaining and improving the property. We always said from the beginning we would never add more rooms because we don't want to lose the experience that we offer our guests. We don't want to get any bigger. I think that's the thing you're getting from La Cuccagna is we're not big. We're big enough that there's a bit of company if you want it, but the property is enormous, so there's always plenty of privacy if you want to be on your own. But we don't want to lose that home-from-home feel. But Sal is always every winter he's got lots of little projects where he's extending the vegetable patch or he's just put in an Alfresco gym next to the swimming pool so people can go and have a morning workout before they have a dip in the pool or jump in the sauna. That's Sal. He built a little brick shed at the end of the swimming pool that was intended for the sun lounges at the end of each season. But as soon as he built it, he was like, that would make a really good sauna. So he's constantly sort of making little changes and updates and improvements at La Cuccagna.

Sarah

So even when there aren't guests here, we're thinking, how can we improve the guest experience and allow them to enjoy more of everything that we've got around us?

Salvatore

For us, there's nothing better or more rewarding than I guess, like instead of going to the car park when they leave and with the satisfaction when they leave and they're satisfied, I think for us it's no better were than they are happy and sort of wanting to come back soon. So what better can you want from your job? Money is rewarding, but he doesn't do anything, like, even close to actually satisfy customer going home. Not anymore a customer - like a friend going on after he's been there for a few days or a week.

Katy

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It sounds like a really perfect existence. And like you said, a whole world away from the life that you left behind. But you don't look back, do you?

Salvatore

No, not to say, like, and I haven't looked back not even once.

Katy

I can just imagine, Sarah and Sal so I really appreciate you taking the time to share your knowledge and experience around Agriturismo with us. And I think our listeners would love to know how they can stay in touch with you and learn more about La Cuccagna. How can they do that?

Sarah

Well, through our website, www.lacuccagna.com we also have several social media accounts but generally through our website. Although everybody likes instant communication these days, if you would like to contact us through our website or info@lacuccagna.com, we normally try to respond immediately. So we try to be as responsive as instant booking or something like this and we generally find that when people inquire about a room, then by the time we finish liaising with them they might have thought that something else is actually more suitable for their needs, so we're really happy to always offer lots of advice and guidance. When we hear what the guests want, we will always advise what's best for them.

Katy

So what you're saying, Sarah, is there's no bot on the end of your website. There's no automated response. It's a full personal experience and that's I think, what people really love. So I'm going to post your website and email address and all of those social media accounts into our show notes. So everyone, make sure you pop on over to lacuccagna.com because his property is absolutely stunning. Not only does it have an infinity pool and a sun-drenched terrace that overlooks the really, truly magical Umbrian countryside, it's also got the amazing Sarah and Sal who are there to greet you as soon as you get out of your car. So Grazie Mille Salvatore and Sarah, thank you so much for joining us here on the podcast today.

Salvatore

Thank you very much for having us.

Sarah

Yes, thank you very much for having us, Katy. We really appreciate it and we look forward to welcoming anybody to La Cuccagna. Grazie.

Katy

Well, listeners, I hope you now have a better understanding of what an agriturismo is. I think we are staying at 4 or 5 during our trip this June and I can't wait to immerse myself in the Italian countryside and its incredible hospitality.

If you like the sound of Umbria and its medieval towns and cities like Gubbio, we'd love you to join us on tour later this year as we explore Umbria during the harvest season. There'll be delicious porchetta, local wine, and freshly pressed olive oil for which the region is celebrated. You'll find all the details on our website at tours.untolditaly.com/umbria

And You're definitely want to go check out La Cuccagna and the stunning infinity pool overlooking the peaceful Umbrian countryside. Sal and Sarah have done a wonderful job of balancing farm life with all the facilities for a relaxing, gorgeous getaway. You can find all their details on the episode show notes at untolditaly.com/126 for episode 126

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.

In next week's episode, we're revisiting a favorite district of Rome - one where you feel the true essence of the city - and it is, of course, Trastevere.

But until then it's "ciao for now".