

Untold Italy Episode 133 - Delicious Products To Try in Liguria

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 133.

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! Hi everyone. Welcome to another episode of Untold Italy where we are returning to one of my favorite Italian regions, one I was delighted to spend some time in a couple of weeks ago and that's Liguria

You may have already visited Liguria when you admired the villages of the Cinque Terre but sadly most people don't go much further than that. And what a shame! It's a gorgeous region where hills and mountains rise up from the beautiful shoreline and let me tell you the food is interesting, so unique even in the Italian context and extremely delicious. And of course it's driven by the local terrain.

Our guest today is Enrica Manzoni, founder of the delightful website A Small Kitchen in Genoa who returns to the podcast to share the unique products you'll find in Liguria that are the core of its cuisine. Enrica joined us last year on episode 106 and thrilled us with some of the lesser known places in the region but today she's here to teach us about her first love, the food of the region.

Luckily I recorded this interview before our trip so I had all the insider knowledge to make some excellent menu choices while we were in the region. So let's get started so you can do the same!

Katy

Bentornata Enrica. Ciao. And welcome back to The Untold Italy Podcast.

Enrica

Ciao Katy. Thank you for having me again. I'm very happy to be here.

Katy

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It is always so lovely to have you on the show. And I was just wondering how things are in beautiful Liguria. Is it starting to get nice and hot?

Enrica

It's starting to be hot, definitely. It's not like May weather - it's July weather, so it's very hot. And when it's sunny, it's like summertime.

Katy

When I think of summer in your region, I think of the smell of fresh basil. And I'm sure we'll talk about that a bit later, but before we do, Enrica, can you please remind our listeners who you are and a little bit about your story?

Enrica

Yes. Thank you. Okay, so I'm Enrica Manzoni. I was born and bred in Genova, the capital of Italian Riviera, where I still live. I'm a food researcher and experience curator. I've been a lawyer for 15 years, actually and then I decided to change my life and to spend my time and devote myself to something I love a lot, to my passions, let's say, which were studying writing, cooking, and Liguria. Liguria was one of my passions and so in 2016, when I left my job as a lawyer, I opened my food blog A Small Kitchen in Genoa, where I share in Italian and in English, traditional family recipes and food stories all about Liguria and the Italian Riviera. And then the following year, I started organizing cooking classes and food experiences for tourists and foreigners here in Liguria. So let's say that my mission now is to preserve the Ligurian cultural identity from a culinary point of view. So I do researches, I visit the remotest corners of the region, I talk to old people, and I try to bring to light our food heritage and to share it with everybody, especially with foreigners who approach to our region and to our food culture. There are very few people doing this, so I feel this like a mission, let's say. And I do this writing about Ligurian cuisine through my blog and my upcoming cookbook, which I will be pleased to tell you more maybe later. And then I organize regional cooking classes in my home. I do food tours in Genova and I consult as a Ligurian food travel designer. So if someone wants to have a food adventure in Liguria, I try to give ideas and tips on where to go and where to eat and what to eat.

Katy

I love how you just combined all your passions into something that's going to actually not just be something that's useful now, but also will leave a really strong legacy for your children and your grandchildren and the people of Liguria. I mean, the food and the produce in Liguria is amazing. I love it. And it's no secret to many listeners of the podcast that Liguria is actually one of my favorite regions to visit in Italy. Which is hard for me to say, but I do but I do just love Liguria and I can't wait to get back there. But I keep saying Liguria, but some people may not know where it is. They do know one specific area of Liguria usually, but they may not

know exactly where it is. So can we just do a quick map check so we can place ourselves in your beautiful region?

Enrica

Yes, definitely. Liguria is a very small region. It is the third smallest region of Italy. It's a narrow strip of land with a moon shape. It's stretching in the northern coast of Italy, from France border to Tuscany. So this is a coastal region, but it is also a mountain region because the region is crossed from east to west to the Ligurian Alps and the Ligurian Apennines. So it's a very narrow tongue of land stretched between mountains and sea in the northern part of Italy.

Katy

And most people know Liguria from the Cinque Terre, which we talked about last time you're on the podcast. We mentioned that there is so much more to Liguria than the Cinque Terre, which are incredibly beautiful towns, and they're absolutely stunning, but it's just a tiny, tiny little piece of this beautiful region. And everyone should go back and listen to the other episode that Enrica kindly shared all her amazing tips on where to go in this area. But today we were going to talk about the produce and the food of Liguria because it's actually really special and really different and unique. And that's what I love about the food in Italy, you do have this diversity, and, I mean, I'm sure there are difficult bits about researching the food culture and history. However, it is very specific to different towns and areas of the region. So I'm sure there is plenty of work for you to do when you're doing your research.

Enrica

Sure, there is plenty of food, plenty of traditional foods and historical foods which are grown in our land since centuries. And I'm going to outline and to tell you just a glimpse of the most iconic and the one that if you travel to Italy, to Italian Riviera, you can buy sometimes or you can taste or you can find in the menus. So something that you can recognize along your traveling in Liguria.

Katy

So where do we start on our Ligurian food journey?

Enrica

We start with what are considered the three pillars of our Ligurian produces. They are called, even here in Liguria, the food ambassadors of Liguria. And these three, let's say which won the prize of being food ambassadors are extra virgin olive oil, wine and basil. So these three are, let's say, the most iconic produce of our region.

Enrica

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Let's start with the wines. I will briefly talk about wines because, first, Liguria is not a region with a great agricultural location, just because we have a very narrow lands. We are mountainous territory, but we produce wine since the Roman Ages. So the production of wine in Liguria is very old. In Middle Ages, Ligurian wines were famous, especially Ligurian wines from Cinque Terre were famous all over Europe and in the 16th century, actually the Ligurian wine was served to the Pope Paul for the third. So it was a very rich wine and very important products of our region. Also, another characteristic of Ligurian wine is that we have a lot of indigenous varieties. That's because the Ligurian sailors used to sail along the area in the Mediterranean Sea. They found a kind of grapes in the Mediterranean along their journeys and when they come back to Liguria, they try to plant them in their own garden. And so many of these varieties grown very, very well in the Ligurian territory and they become indigenous. So we have a variety of wines which are just from Liguria. I give you some ideas because from those vines you have some fine wines which are famous and have the DOC certification. So they are DOC denomination of protected origin.

Katy

I mean, this is important because this is a designation of quality for people that don't know the DOC denomination. If you see on a wine bottle DOC, then you know there's going to be some strict controls around the production methods and the grapes and how the wine is produced exactly.

Enrica

It is linked to the territory and it is produced according to high quality standards. And here in Liguria we have local vines - Vermentino, which is the Ligurian Vermentino, not the Sardinian Vermentino and it's a fresh white wine, sparkling and with flower and herbie flavor. Then we have Pigato. Pigato is the variety predominant in the province of Imperia and Albenga. So in the west you can find very good Pigato. Pigato is always white wine and it's a stronger wine so it's high degree in alcohol and also the taste is very fruity and strong as it's character, let's say. And then we have Bianchetta. Bianchetta is a wine producing the back country of Genova. This is a very old wine. It's always white wine and it's an easy wine. I mean, we have it for we have it with Focaccia, so it's a light white wine.

Enrica

Then if we have to move to the red grapes, we have Rossese, which grows in the west Italian Riviera, the most famous which has the DOC certification is Rossese di Dolceacqua. Dolceacqua is a very wonderful medieval village in the west, on the mountains in the west, in the back of Imperia then we have Ormeasco, the most famous is Ormeasco di Pornassio. This is also wine with strong taste so it's an important wine that usually accompany meat and game, for example. And then we have Granaccia. Granaccia is also a grape variety, mainly cultivated in the interland of Savona so this is always red wine. And then we have other DOC certifications which do not actually match with indigenous variety but represents wines produced in a certain area. So we have the DOC certification of the wine producing

balcocerella, which is in the back country of Genova. This is made of a mix of different grapes. And one of the wines more famous are the wine of Coronata. Coronata is the hill in the back country of Genova, which was devoted to producing wine since medieval ages. So that was the hill of wines of the Genoa town during Middle Ages. And then there are wines produced in the Gulf of del Tigullio. Gulf del Tigullio goes from Genova to Chiavari. So we are in the east and they are white, rose and red wines. It depends, really, on where they are produced. Same thing for the DOC Colline di Levante, which means all the wines produced around La Spezia and Levante.

Enrica

And same thing about Cinque Terre. So the wines, which are usually white wines, produced in the Cinque Terre area. So Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Riomaggiore in the hills in the Cinque Terre, because Cinque Terre are just mountains falling in the sea.

Katy

It's so amazing how many varieties there are. I think it's incredible. I think when people think of Italian wine, they may know a handful of - they may know Chianti, Barbera, Montelcino - uh but you just told us about so many different ones. Incredible.

Enrica

See, there are so many in Liguria. Well, I just mentioned that the most famous. Liguria is very rich in varieties, very rich in wine producers and wine labels. But the production is so small due to the amount of land we have. So there are so many small wine producers that none of them has enough product to sell abroad. This is why people do not know about Ligurian wines. They know about Chianti, for example, because of the Chianti producer produces tons of wine and can sell it abroad in the world. In Liguria it's not possible.

Katy

And that's why when people are visiting this area, it's like a very special thing to taste this wine, because you're not going to be able to get it anywhere else. And of course, it matches the food perfectly, because that's just how it's done.

Enrica

Exactly. In fact, when I have clients over, we have cooking classes, we taste wines and they say, "Where can we find them online? Where can we buy it?" And I'm saying, I'm sorry, you can bring back home some bottles if you can, but it is very difficult to find it in the US or in Australia, because the production is so small.

Katy

But I think that's special.

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Enrica

Yeah, it makes the food trip in Liguria even more special, because this is something that you can taste here and that's your experience. So you experience this year and it's not repeatable. I think it is part of the nice thing of exploring the food culture of some regions, is that you can have it just there.

Katy

Yeah, exactly. We don't need to homogenize it. We can have it in the place, in the moment. And that just means everyone needs to just really relax and enjoy the moment because it's not going to happen again. And I think there's something beautiful about that.

Enrica

And also you cannot take a picture of wine. So you have really to immerse yourself, taste it and enjoy the experience because you cannot bring photos at home unless of a glass of wine, which will not mean anything. This is very meditative experience.

Katy

Yes, really.

Enrica

And this is about wine. Then we have, of course, Extra Virgin Olive Oil. Extra Virgin Olive Oil for the Ligurians is history because the cultivation of the olive trees really shaped our territory. The terraces that you can see in all the Ligurian hills, the wood terraces with the stone walls, they were built just to be able to cultivate olive trees. So our territory was really modified by this culture - this cultivation. Also Extra Virgin Olive Oil influenced the trades, open communication routes. So it dictated the rhythm the rhythms of entire generations. So Extra Virgin Olive oil for us is very important.

Katy

Is there a special variety of it - I've been learning a lot about it. Every area in Italy reckons there's is the best.

Enrica

Oh ours is the best!! But we have a variety of olives, which are the Taggiasca olives, which I would say is the main variety of olive we have. We have also others in the east, but in the west, where the Extra Virgin Olive Oil production is bigger. The main olives are the Taggiasca. And Taggiasca is a small olive with different colors. So you can find it black, it's green, so it's not just one color. And the oil is very fruity and it's a mild oil. So Ligurian oil is not very

strong. It's perfect for cooking because it's flavored, not to cover the other flavors in their dish. And it's also good for seasoning. So this is also why we use it a lot in our cuisine. I would say that we do not use butter at all in the Ligurian cuisine because our extra virgin olive oil is perfect for cooking. So we can really use everywhere. We also use it for making sweets and dessert. So it's fantastic. And of course, if you have to buy Extra Virgin Olive Oil in Liguria, look for the DOP label, which means that it is made with Ligurian olives according to certain quality standards. It is made pressing olive just with a mechanical process, so just pressure and simplification. And there are no chemical refinings. This is very important. Also, as for the wines for the oil, there are DOC certification according to the place where the oil is produced. So there is the oil Riviera dei Fiori, which is produced in the west of Liguria. So around Imperia in the Imperia area. The Imperia area is the historical area of Liguria devoted to cultivate olive trees, especially Val d'Aveto, really. In the back of interior there is Lucinasco, which is a wonderful small village, which is the village of oil. Lucinasco, Pietrabrana Borgonovo. These are the villages of Extra Virgin Olive, Oil. Then there is the oil produced from Alassio to Varazze. So let's say in the center of Liguria, if we have to think about an arch, in the middle of the arch, and it is called Riviera di Ponente Savonese. And then the last one is Riviera di Levante. So the oil produced in the province of Genova and La Spezia. So this is mostly our Extra Virgin Olive Oil is produced in Liguria.

Enrica

And then the third pillar, which I would say is the most important and most renewed, is basil. And basil is Genovese basil. So it's a variety of basil. There are 60 varieties of basil all over the world. The one we grow in Liguria is the Genoese basil. It has a special shape, of course. It is a small leaves with the oval shape, and usually it is harvested when it is small and bright green, because this is the perfect size for making pesto, because with our basil we make basil pesto, which is, I think, the second most eaten sauce in the world. So it makes a long journey from Liguria to all over the world. So our pesto is made with basil.

Katy

So the leaves of the basil plant, the Genovese basil plant, are very small, are they?

Enrica

Yes, they are small. They are harvested when they are, let's say, as small as a coin.

Katy

Wow. Okay. Yes. Sometimes when we get basil here, when we call it basil, the leaves are quite large, actually. So I can imagine the flavor is different too.

Enrica

It is different. The flavor is different indeed. Well, any basil has different flavors depending on the essential oil that is combined in the special variety. Our basil is not minty, so it has no mint flavor, and it's very sweet. The leaves in it are bright green and not dark green. And you can find our basil just in Liguria. So if you go somewhere else, you go in Campania, you go in the Emilia Romagna, you go in Sicily - the basil you find there is not the same, though it is always produced in Italy. So we have a special soil and we have also special climate elements such as the sun and the sea breeze, because our basil is most of the time, let's say, mainly cultivated on the seaside. So the sea breeze passes through the cultivation and really influence the flavor of this product. And if you want to visit some basil producer, I have two recommendations. You can go in Celle Ligure which is close to Genova, but not inside the Genova city, and here there is Calcagno which is a producer, and I think he produces the best basil in Ligurian. But that's just my humble opinion, and I know that probably get in touch and see if they organize some kind of visit or tour tasting or something like that. That's a very big farm, and it is just on the seaside, so you can see from the hills of basil, you can see the sea. It's amazing. Very wonderful. And the other spot, which is the other place where to go, is the hill in the back country of Genova which was devoted to growing basil since at least one century. And there are the biggest basil producer and pesto producer, the one who produces pesto can and jars, fresh pesto in jars. And there, there are some producer who organizes business and experiences to link to basil. Then if you want to learn how to make pesto, that's me! In general, of course.

Katy

But do you grow your own basil?

Enrica

Not for making pesto, because for making pasta you need a big quantity. So that's not worth the effort. I have always, as I would say, most of the Ligurian cook, a couple of basil plants on my window sill. But I use basil to put in my tomato sauce, on pizza, on my tomato salad, so on my soup. But not for pesto. For pesto you need a lot of big bunches of basil.

Katy

So you go to the market to get that, would you?

Enrica

I go to the market. We have mountains of basil at the market usually. And you buy big bouquet like a wedding bouquet of basil.

Katy

Imagine someone's wedding instead of flowers, they have like a bunch of basil.

Enrica

That would be great. It's so nice and so smelly and with such a wonderful smell. So that could be a good idea.

Katy

I love it. So what does this all go with? And this is what I love about Italian thing. It's always symbiotic, there's always connection. You don't just have the olive oil, everything's connected somehow and how you pull it together in the dishes that we're going to talk about another time. But just in terms of the vegetables and what else is available, what are the main ingredients that you find?

Enrica

I would say that in Liguria there is a big plain, just one big plain, because the rest is mountain beaches, which is in Albenga. And in the Albenga plain they have what are called the fabulous four. Four products which are very characteristic of that land, but they also have characteristic of all the regions. And they are tomatoes, of course. And we have a kind of tomatoes which is called coeur de boeuf -beef heart. Literally. They are huge tomatoes which are very strange shape, that looks like a heart and they are very sweet and pulpy. And if they are ripe, they are very ripe. They are fantastic, especially for making salad, not for sauces, but for salads - so coeur de boeuf. Then we have artichokes. In the Albenga plains they grow artichokes which were famous in the Middle Ages and they were reviewed as the sugar of the Genovese. La zuccherio de Genovese, because they were are a very special vegetables, very sweet and very rare. Also in the past artichokes were not considered as vegetables. They were considered something in between fruit and a flower. So they had something artistic and romantic in their production and the way the nobles usually eat them. Anyway, our artichoke in Albenga are fantastic and you can also, of course, taste them in fall and winter, beginning of spring. Then when spring starts, the season is over. Same thing for asparagus. We have the violet asparagus maybe you are used, I don't know in Australia, if you're used to violet asparagus, probably you have white or green.

Katy

We do, we have white. We sometimes can find the violet one, but not often.

Enrica

Okay. And the same here in Italy, the one produced in Albenga. Albenga are special and extremely expensive, but the cost is extremely good. So there is always a balance in between price per value. And then something that always amazed my clients when we do food tours at the market during the summertime are the Trombetta zucchini, which are zucchini with very long and thin, bright green with a flower at the end. They really look like trumpets and they are very sweet with a mild flavor. And we used to have them stewed with some basil or boiled

and then season it as a salad. Or we have frittatas with them and they are very common in our cuisine, especially for the summertime. We eat tons of them during summertime.

Katy

I love zucchini.

Enrica

Then in the back of Imperia we grow a lot of pulses, fagioli beans, actually. Fagiolo di conio e Pigna, which is also recognized as a slow food presidia. Do you know if you know what slow food presidia? Food is the main food organization which was born in actually impediment and then spread all over the world. And there are some products that are protected by slow food because of their tradition, because of the link they have with the territory, because they want to support the producers in order to permit them to go on growing those special foods which otherwise would be consulted by globalization. And here in Liguria we have some and so these pulses are one of them. And then we have very important also linked to the recipe of pesto, we have Aglio di Vessalico, which is a garlic produced in Vessalico. This is in the back of Albenga. There is one village in the back of Albanga and Aglio di Vessalico is renewed also outside the Italian borders. And it is special for making pesto because it is very sweet, spicy, but most of all highly digestible. So you can eat it raw without any problem.

Enrica

And this is why we use it for making pesto.

Katy

This is so interesting, isn't it? Because I think in the rush to adopt Italian food around the world, we forget that it's come from a certain type of garlic. So the recipe says three cloves of garlic, it's probably a lot more, and a bunch of basil and extra virgin olive oil. But I mean, the taste is going to be completely different depending on where it's been grown and what the terrain is and the variety of the... It's so fascinating to hear you talk about it because you sort of go, why does the food taste better in Italy? Well this is why. It's because what we're trying to do at home is replicate something that can't be replicated. In fact, unless you can find these specific just like the wine we were talking about before, the specific varieties.

Enrica

We are more sophisticated, definitely about choosing the ingredients and the variety of ingredients. So we just don't have garlic. We have rose garlic, Vessalico garlic, new garlic, old garlic. And depending on also when it is harvested, it has a different taste. And I think that also proximity makes a difference. Because if I buy my garlic, which was produced less than 50 km far from my house and it is freshly picked, the flavor is bomb. It's a bomb.

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Katy

Yeah, yeah.

Enrica

Loading in your mouth and they really influence the flavors of your plate. And so I think this is the special thing about Italy is that most of all of the ingredients we put in a plate has lots of taste.

Katy

I don't know if I've told you this before, but the other day I was at the shop and they have kiwi fruit from Italy. I was like, what is that like? Why do we need because I always check where it's come from.

Enrica

We are one of the biggest producer of kiwi. Indeed in Italy is one of the biggest producers of kiwi. Would never say if someone hadn't told me.

Katy

Me, but why do we need to ship it halfway around the world? I mean, it just seems crazy. When you think about it logically, it's got to be refrigerated so it's not going to have that fresh from the tree taste anyway. I don't know. I think we just need to get back to these basics and just go, right, let's work out what's seasonal and goodness, what's local as well. And if that means maybe we need to make some compromises and only have the basil pesto in summer, well so be it.

Enrica

You're right. And then I want to stress on the fact that Liguria is just not coastal region, but it's a mountainous region. So many of the main producers of our land, especially from a historical point of view, they come from our mountains. And we have many potatoes varieties. Especially, we have two varieties of potatoes which are fantastic. One is Quarantina, which is producing the hills in the back of Genova. And one are the potatoes from Pignone, which is in the back of La Spezia. Both of them are incredible. So if you go in a restaurant and you find on the menu Patata Quarantina made or gnocci with patate quarantina go for them because they are not usual gnocci - they are made with extremely good potatoes. But also our mountain potatoes are fantastic. They have a flavor, they have flavor, they have a taste. They are just not a mash of things to put in your hands, in your mouth. But they have a strong flavor.

Enrica

Then we have onions. Also, some kind of onions are protected by slow food. For example, the Belendina onions, which are onions as big as like a melon.

Katy

Yeah, like a melon. Okay. Huge.

Enrica

Yes. Red onions, as big as a melon. Extremely sweet. And we use them for making ketchup, for making sauces, for making fritatta, savory pies. Or just bake it as a whole - you cut them in half and then you put them in the oven with just some oil and salt and let it roast for 40/45 minutes. They are fantastic.

Enrica

And then we have special things because we have truffles. People say that truffle is just in Piedmonte. No way. Not just in Alba area. No. We have truffle too in Val Bormida, which is the valley in the back of Savona, which actually connects Liguria to Piedmonte to the Le Langue area. There we have a lot of truffles. So if you want to make a truffle hunting in Liguria, search for that because you will find it. We have black truffles. They are very tasty. Then we have mushrooms - porcini mushrooms everywhere. All our woods are full of mushrooms. So we have them, of course, fresh during beginning of summertime and the end of summer time. So fall, end of summertime, fall, that are the season for eating mushrooms, fried mushrooms, mushroom risotto, mushroom sauce. And of course we dry them. So dried mushrooms are one of the pillars of our pantry. We always have dried mushrooms in a Ligurian pantry because mushrooms brings an umami flavor. And so we put it in stew, we put it in sauces, in tart. So that's a very common ingredient in our kitchen.

Enrica

Then we have - I go on the just to the mountains, chestnuts and the famous chestnuts. They saved people from famine. We have towns of chestnut trees. And the chestnut trees is called the bread tree - l'albero del pane because they are so important. And we have hazelnuts, lots of hazelnuts. Not only in Piedemonte, they have hazelnuts - we have hazelnuts as well in the Chiavari area. And very good quality of hazelnut. And we make wonderful hazenut cake and biscuits, such as Baci di Dama and so they are very good in it.

Katy

So all of these amazing foods in the mountains, delicious. I love mushrooms. That's one of the things that I love. My dad's actually allergic to mushrooms, so we didn't have a lot of them when we were growing up, but I always try and seek them out now if I'm at a restaurant and I cook with them because I love mushrooms so much. How delicious. But that's in the

mountains. But obviously, because you're so close to the sea, I'm sure there's some amazing seafood.

Enrica

Well, seafood we have some. Actually fishes are not so common in our cuisine because the Ligurian sea is not so catchy. But we have indeed some very important seafood in our history and our tradition. First of all, anchovies of course, if you think about Liguria, you think about fried anchovies for aperitivo joined with some white wine. Fried anchovies are everywhere. We have many dishes about anchovies. The season is from May to September. Those are the periods when we have local anchovies. So that's the period in which you have to look for them in the menus. If you find them in winter, they are not from Liguria, but in winter, you can enjoy salted anchovies because, of course, our sea is so catchy and full of anchovies that the leftovers, let's say, which the anchovies not eaten, were traditionally preserved under salt and especially Monterosso and the Cinque Terre, famous for the production of salted anchovies, and they were usually traded all over Europe and they were in the inland of Italy. So salted anchovies are fantastic for cooking and for eating alone with some bread and butter, which is one of my favorite aperitivo ever.

Katy

I love anchovies. Is there a particular brand? Because that might be a good souvenir to bring back. Is there a particular brand that's good?

Enrica

No. If you find them canned and from any local fisherman, they will be fine. We have a special place close to Camogli, which is the Tonnarella di Camogli. It's a very old place where they used to catch tuna and also anchovies. And they do salted anchovies and they are very good, very high quality. But you don't have to look for a label, just look for a local label. That would be enough. Okay, so, you know, that the Ligurian one. Then we have mussels in La Spezia, muscari -cozze elsewhere in Italy. But in Liguria, we call them muscari, as in English, muscles, because that's the last word. The original word is the Latin one, mussels. And they are harvested, grown, farmed in the La Spezia area, Portofino, La Spezia that is a big area where they produce them and where you can eat them. In many restaurants, they have special dishes like stuffed mussels, fantastic mussel soup, pasta with mussels.

Katy

Can you get them in Levanto? Just asking for a friend.

Enrica

Definitely they have. Definitely they have.

Katy

Okay. Because I have a couple of children who have been known to eat all of my dinner when I get mussels. So they'll be thrilled to know that you can get it where we're going. Amazing.

Enrica

That's amazing. And then in Santa Margherita, which is close to Portofino, they catch red prawns. They are famous for red prawns, which are big red prawns, very pulpy and tasty. And they are fantastic rows. Of course you can have a pasta. Of course you can have them grilled, but raw are best. So if you go in the area so in the area of Santa Margherita, even Genova, because they bring the seafood to the Genova restaurants, you can find fresh ones. So taste them.

Katy

It's like sashimi, isn't it? Like that quality is so high and just drizzled with olive oil is so delicious - I've had this.

Enrica

Si, si, definitely olive oil and some salt and sometimes some lemon or a vinaigrette made with olive oil, salt and lemon and just a squeeze on top, very few. And they open it in the middle, butterfly and then you have to scoop the pulp from the shell.

Katy

Yeah, that's the best. I mean, I'm a big seafood lover and I definitely went back for a second round of those prawns when we stayed inside the Margherita. They are fantastic.

Enrica

And then the last two small things, though we are not big producers of meat in Liguria, we have some cheese and we have some cold cuts. I would just outline three most characteristic cheeses of our region. There are many other small producers here and there. And this is also nice if you travel around Liguria, look for cheese producers and taste their cheese, but they are not famous, but they are very good as well. The first one I want to tell you is Prescinsêua. I mentioned Prescinsêua, not because you can find it at the restaurant or ask for that, but because this is one of the most characteristic ingredients of our cuisine. It's something in between ricotta and yogurt. It's a very fresh cheese which is produced just adding rennet to the milk and letting milk rest for a while and then skimming the surface. That is very fresh. And we use it for making ravioli, for making pansotti, focaccia - cheese focaccia. We use it for Torta Pasqualina, which is our savory pie, famous savory pie, and for pizza. So we use Prescinsêua in many ways and you can find it in Genova and in general area.

Enrica

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Then if we go west, the west area of Liguria, especially the mountainside, is the only part of Liguria that's a shepherd area. So they have sheep and goats and they produce a very good goat cheese which is Toma di pecora Brigasca. Brigasca goat, is a slow food presidio. It's a very local variety of goats and they produce this cheese, which is fantastic. And also the area of Brigue in the back of Imperia, the area, let's say there are many cheese makers and there you can find very good cheese and also you can find there a very special cuisine which maybe I will tell you more next time, which is called cucina bianca which is a cuisine made just with the shepherd's products, which most of them are white. And that's a very special kind of Ligurian cuisine. Maybe we can comment about that in another episode.

Enrica

Last cheese I want to mention, which is also protected by slow food is the Toma di Mucca Cabannina. Cabanina cow. That's a variety of cow which is indigenous of Genova. And you can eat it, but the animals are not that many, so they usually farm them for making cheese. And for making this famous cheese you can find it in the background of Genova or in Val d'Aveto, which is a very wonderful valley. Maybe I talk about Val d'Aveto in the first episode when we discuss about Liguria not being only Cinque Terre and it is a valley in the back of Chiavari. That's a valley full of foods and joins with this cheese.

Katy

I love cheese. Can you find it in shops or would they serve at restaurants in other parts of the region?

Enrica

In the restaurants of the area, you can find it. You can find it in the local shops. Or the best thing is look for cheese producers, because the production still in this case is not that big. So they do not have enough products to sell on the big chains and supermarkets. So you really have to go for them and look for them. And then we have as a cold cuts, we have the famous Genoese salami, which is very different from the one probably you find in your supermarket, because our salami is not that big. It's a small section, it has big fat chunks inside and it is flavored with garlic and white wine. Those are the main flavors. And it is produced in Sant'Olcese, which is a small village in the back of Genova. And this salami is the most famous in Liguria and even elsewhere. So Salami Sant'Olcese is the one that we usually have during this period of time with fresh fava beans. We have fresh fava beans, salami, Sant'Olcese and some Pecorino cheese. And we have the summertime aperitivo.

Katy

Am ready for that. Sounds great.

Enrica

And last but not least, if you go to a very good traditional restaurant or in some very good grocery, you can ask for Testa in Cassetta, which is a very typical cold cut of our region. Literary Testa in Cassetta means heads in the box because they take different pieces of the heads of the pork and they cut them, boiled and seasoned them with the spices. And they prepare this salami, which is extremely good because the poor people need to use all the pieces of any part of the pork just to save food. And they invented very good dishes, thanks to their needs of using everything. And one of these is teste en caseta, which is fantastic.

Katy

We have a saying in English that's called necessity is the mother of invention. I don't know if you have something similar in Italian exactly.

Enrica

And so I've told you, let's say, the main produce in Italy, in Liguria, though there are many others and we would never finish this episode if we go all.

Katy

I know it's a lot, but I think we need to talk about the sweets another time. But that's a whole another episode - Sweet Liguria. Now, Enrica, this is why I love Italy. You've got such a diverse country and you won't find many of these products in other places. Like we've mentioned, the different types of basil, the wine varieties, the cheese. Everything is so different and unique. So that's why it's a complete adventure when you go around Italy, even within the little districts of Liguria, you can find so many different things. How can our listeners explore Genoa and Liguria with you?

Enrica

They can discover more about my services, food experiences on my website, asmallkitcheningenoa.com They can follow me on Instagram and they will see my Ligurian food adventures on that. Or we can keep in touch with my newsletter, subscribing to my newsletter where I share recipes and the Ligurian foodie tips and things to see and to taste in Liguria.

Katy

And you've also, it's very exciting. You've got a book coming out soon too, haven't you?

Enrica

Indeed. I have a cookbook coming out in September and it will be Ligurian Cookbook, of course, where I collect the best of my family recipes and the most iconic Ligurian recipes. And it will be in Italian and in English as well. So it will be bilingual and I wrote and shoot it. So I'm very proud of that work because it's entirely mine.

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Katy

My goodness. You should be like, it's enough to write a book in one language, let alone two. And also provide the photography, because Enrika's photography is absolutely beautiful, actually. So at the very least, go check out her Instagram, but also just get in touch with her because if you want to discover more of this delightful free region and I can't wait to go back myself. You should definitely do that, Enrika. I can't wait to go back very soon, and I really appreciate you sharing all your really deep knowledge and passion for your region with our listeners. Thank you so much for joining us on Untold Italy today.

Enrica

Thank you. Hope to talk to you soon again and that your followers enjoy the episode and visit Liguria.

Katy

We will, and we'll be back with Sweet Liguria sometime soon.

Enrica

Thank you so much.

Katy

Ciao

Katy

So as I mentioned earlier, this interview was recorded prior to our trip and let me tell you I am very very glad I'd had the opportunity to hear about some of the products we should be seeking out before I got there. Two words - stuffed mussels. Seriously, these were one of the top food revelations of our 5 weeks in Italy. All our family loves seafood, especially mussels, muscoli or cozze as they are known to most Italians - but these little beauties were next level delicious. Small sweet and so full of flavor. They were stuffed with a breadcrumb and herb mixture and served with a tomato broth. I cant stop thinking about them. Also the crisp Vermentino wine matched this dish so well - amazing

And On one of the last nights of our trip we did a sunset boat cruise down the coast admiring the Cinque Terre villages sipping the vermentino wine and munching on local pies made with porcini mushrooms and herbs, plus salami and toma cheese and I dont mind saying I felt a little smug knowing a little bit more about it thanks to Enrica.

If you would like to learn more about Ligurian cuisine and its influences from the mountain and the sea, definitely follow Enrica on Instagram and via her recipe blog A Small Kitchen in

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Genoa. On there she's also provided a lot of travel tips for the region. We used her post about Levante where we stayed for a few nights and it was full of the best eating tips you can imagine.

You'll find links to Enrica's website and all the products she mentioned in the show notes at untolditaly.com/133

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That's all for today, next week we'll take another dip into the magic of the Italy... "ciao for now"