

Untold Italy Episode 135 - Pilgrim Paths of Puglia

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 135.

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 friends, Happy Friday and welcome to your weekly virtual trip to Italy! Today we're heading to the south eastern corner of the boot - the heel if you will - to the gorgeous and ancient region of Puglia.

I was lucky enough to spend a week there recently and was just entranced by the beauty of the scenery, its gorgeous towns and of course amazing food and wine. But underpinning all of this is a deep and rich history stretching back centuries that has, of course, shaped the area as we know it today. Puglia lies in a very strategic position in the Mediterranean and as we'll hear, has been on the path of Mediaeval pilgrims whose stories and motivations may not have been so different to our own

Our guest is Paulo, a local tour guide who has been working with visitors to his region for many years. Paulo and I met this year in June and he's got such a brilliant way of sharing the tales of Puglia that I just had to invite him onto the show

Katy

Benvenuto Paolo, welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Paolo

Ciao everybody it is really, really nice to be here with you.

Katy

I'm so excited. It's so great to talk to you again after a very brief meeting in Matera. So how's the summer season going for you all over there in Puglia?

Paolo

It's going great. After covid, we are almost fully recovered. It's really hot though, really hot. So for the brave people that are coming July and August, it's really like a challenge.

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Katy

Yeah, I mean, I was there in June, wasn't I? And it was pretty hot then. So I can imagine it's like up to 40 degrees Celsius, right? That's pretty hot. Wow. Okay. Now, Paolo, you and I know each other, but let's introduce you to our audience. Can you tell them a bit about yourself and your interests and how you came to be guiding in Puglia?

Paolo

Okay. I was born in Lecce a few years ago. I studied what we call the preservation of the cultural heritage, which is basically history and art history. And I always wanted to work as a tour guide because when I started, Puglia was completely unknown town. Where I was born, Lecce, was completely abandoned, there was nothing there. All these buildings were in, growing - plants were growing out of the walls, asphalt everywhere. It was a disaster. There were no hotels, no pubs, nothing. And I wanted to like help on my own country, I invest in all my energies and my studies trying to do something for my country and not because of me, but it worked out because I did it exactly when people are slowly starting to discover Puglia and in the last 25 years, it's amazing how much the region has grown. The amount of shops and companies - it's incredible. Wine, for instance. We were not producing wine anymore. Now we are again the number one producer in Italy. So it tells you how the region has developed in the last 25 years.

Katy

Well, that's incredible. Obviously I hadn't been there 25 years ago, but I have been there recently and it's definitely got a really energetic feeling about Puglia. So there's still some really rustic areas, but what I really like about Puglia is you go to some of these smaller towns like Cisternino or Locorotondo and there's a real artistic feeling about the towns and real pride in their local culture.

Paolo

Exactly. I think that's the key word. What has changed, let's say from my dad's generation, it's really like pride. We now are extremely proud of ourselves, our identity, our culture, our food. So the minute we have people coming, we want to share with them. Sometimes too much, like we push too much people to try our stuff. But it's really what you can feel if you come. People are extremely friendly because after ages where nobody was coming to Puglia, now we're all excited.

Katy

I can tell you the hospitality is pretty special there, actually. And I think that's part of, like you said, what makes it unique and different and special because it's a really genuine hospitality. Like as you said, it's done out of pride. And I would say anything you're offered in

Puglia you should try because it's going to be pretty amazing. I think most of our listeners know I've tasted my way around Italy a lot, but you're going to get some very fresh and delicious local food and wine and olive oil and all of the things. It's really amazing.

Paolo

We were ashamed in the past of being so simple. Now it's kind of trendy to be simple. So we're not ashamed anymore of saying, oh, we just eat bruschetta, good bread, good tomatoes, and good olive oil in the past seemed too little, and now instead, people appreciate. So all of a sudden we wake up and say, oh, good.

Katy

Well the tomatoes are really good. They taste like a tomato. Sometimes when you go to Italy and you taste a tomato and you're like, oh, I remember what a tomato is supposed to taste like because it's just a massive flavor bomb. It's amazing. So, Paolo, actually I'm really interested to know a little bit more about Puglia and the history maybe like, how did it come to be ashamed of itself almost? And then obviously you've talked about how that's changed in recent years. But what's the sort of the longer history about Puglia going back centuries?

Paolo

Why we got ashamed simply because, especially at the end of World War II, Italy has invested a lot in new industries. Let's say that Fiat is probably the symbol of this new age we call the boom age, and all the investments have been made up north. So a lot of people, including my dad, that was a tailor, the idea was that the future was northern Italy. So my dad tried to forget about his origin, his language, his dialect, and moved north to Milan and Florence to learn more. But it was basically treated like a peasant. There was a lot of racism back then and that's why he didn't want to show them that he was from the south. Because there was the idea that people from the south were basically peasants and not civilized. But actually. If you want to go back in history. That was completely different. Because if we go back in the Middle Ages, the Mediterranean Sea was the major highway for doing basically everything. So Milan was the peripheral area of the economy and Puglia was, and Sicily - they are in the center of the Mediterranean area. So we were much richer in the Middle Ages because of this. And I'm talking about people traveling, I'm talking about goods, even like luxury goods - textile, silk, also spices, pepper, all of these goods used to travel from the east to west and basically passing through. Puglia.

Paolo

Because the geography. So just maybe we can explain to people who maybe don't know where Puglia is, exactly where it is, because it's a really strategic position when it comes down to it.

Paolo

Yeah, you're right. If you look on the map, Puglia is like a long peninsula. It stretches east southeast of Italy and we are very close to the other side when I mean the other side, I mean, now, Albania, Montenegro and Greece. Well, the closest point is only 50 nautical miles. So extremely close. If you go there, you can get a message on your phone that tells you, welcome to Greece while you're still in Puglia, because we're so close. And you see the mountains of mainland Greece, very clearly, especially winter time. And so in the past, to go, let's say, to Istanbul or to Jerusalem or even to China people used to travel along the coast till Otranto, which is a little village south of Lecce, then cross to the other side where you have the border between Albania and Montenegro. And from there you could go or by both following the coast all the way to Jerusalem or inland all the way to Istanbul, Jerusalem. And then from there or to Egypt or basically towards India and China. So basically we are very strategic because all the goods moving from all over Europe or going to all over Europe, we're basically passing through us.

Katy

Yeah. And it's this story which I really wanted to explore further with you today because for our listeners Paolo when I first met Paolo, virtually, he was telling me about the pilgrim routes that go through Puglia and I was just amazed and really excited to learn more about them. I really wanted to get him onto the show to talk about Puglia because obviously, as you can tell, he's got great love for his countryside and all of that, but he also has some great stories to tell about the pilgrim trail. So why don't you kick us off and I'll ask some questions as we go along.

Paolo

So let me give you like, a little introduction. Sometimes we know more about Crusades. So the Crusaders that have traveled to go to Jerusalem free, but not so many people know the reason why crusaders wanted to go to Jerusalem and to set Jerusalem free. Actually, the very first Crusade, that was 1099, so at the end of the 11th century, was to establish a deal with the Arabs to give a permit to all the travelers to freely go to see where basically Jesus lived. Because in the Middle Ages there were a lot of people from different classes, so very poor or extremely rich that wanted at least once in their lives travel to Rome and then from Rome to Jerusalem. So basically it's the same route used by the luxury goods moving up and down or actually east and west. And it was so important that if you travel to Italy, you will see how much our country has changed thanks to this big, let's call it business. I don't want to be insulting religious people, but it was also a business because we're talking about people traveling, so needing a series of things starting from, let's say hotels, accommodation, places to eat, but also protection money, hospitals, hotels. So there were a lot of organizations that used to basically follow these people along these routes all the way to the east. That's the other thing that people usually believe. It's not just one path, so it's not one route. We call it Francigena Way, but it's actually a series of itineraries essentially leaving from all over Europe. The longest one started in Ireland, goes to England and then goes from Calais to

Rome and then from Rome to Brindisi in Puglia and then from Brindisi to Istanbul and then Jerusalem. It's a very long walk to get to see the places where Jesus lived. Why people want to do that, several reasons. Sometimes you want to do to thank God, for like because you have a good family, you are a successful career or you want to go to ask for something. You have a relative that is ill and you want to take care of it. So you say, if you make a miracle, I'm going to go to Jerusalem to thank you there. But also simply because of adventure, just to travel, to go and see different countries and different people. This has modified so much our landscape and our villages.

Paolo

Even if you go to Tuscany, let's say. People know Tuscany very well usually. And in Tuscany there's a lot of villages built on top of the hills and not like on the flat sections because pilgrim used to travel on the hills to be away from the possible dangers and they loved to stop every, let's say, 20 or 30 kilometers in a village and villages used to have a very long road going all across the village where the pilgrims used to walk. Usually a big church with a very high bell tower works as a point of reference. You're walking, you're looking for directions. You finally see a bell tower far in the distance and he said finally that's my next destination. But also to visit, I don't know, tombs of important saints. For instance, you want to go to Venice and you're in Venice, you have a chance to see the tomb of Saint Mark, which is one of the evangelists. Venetians essentially stole the body of Saint Mark to have an important relic to be visited by travelers. Same as in Puglia - Saint Nicholas. We have the body of Saint Nicholas in Bari - stolen in 1087. So exactly where the pilgrimages are starting. And basically fishermen, sailors from Bari went to Turkey to steal the body of Saint Nicholas. And they build a massive church in Bari dedicated to Saint Nicholas, which is one of the most important places to go if you're a pilgrim.

Paolo

Then I lived in another town, that is another place called Trani, for instance. And they invented essentially another saint to challenge with Bari, not to have these people passing by. And this guy that was basically made saint is by chance called Nicholas as well. So people, I imagine them like all confusing Nicholas, oh, Trani is Nicolas, let's go to Trani. And each of these places like Trani, Brindisi, Bitonto, Otranto they all have a port so they can attract these travelers and they offer them the possibility to get a boat to go to the other side. So it was all organized.

Paolo

On top of this organization, usually there are big organizers - let's say travel agencies. One of the most famous one, usually known for other reasons, is the Knights Templar. The Knights Templar, or the Maltese Knights, were essentially monks that asked the Pope to be allowed to carry weapons. They have created a system to support the pilgrimage with several services. So for instance, you could go, let's say in England, you could go to talk to the Maltese Nights to say, okay, I have some cash, but I don't want to carry this cash all the way to Jerusalem. So

you could give this cash to them. They would issue like a document with all your details, and with this document you could go to their offices along the way to get cash that you could spend for your needs. They also offered organized groups with somebody carrying weapons so that you could travel with them feeling safe all along the way. And that actually has attracted also traders, merchants, because it was safer for them to travel with these religious groups because of the monks - they were basically trained soldiers. I don't know if you have questions so far.

Katy

Yeah, no, I was just an observation. It comes up quite a lot in the podcast. It's just how we think over a thousand years later, that we've invented all these new fancy ways of doing things, when in fact it's been going on for centuries. We're just working on a similar theme. It's really fascinating, this whole concept of banking and travel agencies. I think it's fascinating.

Paolo

Yeah, we basically haven't invented anything. It was already existing. So, like, we have places organized along a specific itinerary designed by this company. So, for instance, we have near Puglia, Matera. Matera belonged to the itinerary sponsored by the Maltese Knights. So if you travel to Matera, you can find churches with the Maltese Knights cross on their doors because they were basically ruling that itinerary. If you instead go to Brindisi, you can find a lot of symbols of the Knights Templar body, same thing, Knights Templar. And there's of course, a lot of symbols to follow because if I'm on an itinerary, on a pilgrimage on the way to Jerusalem, I want to make sure that every step I take is the right one. So I'm looking for symbols or images. In Puglia, specifically, we have two major ones. One is Saint Michael, the Archangel Michael, and the other one is Saint Nicholas. So if I'm traveling looking for Saint Michael, let's say, I'm going to look for churches or places where I can see the image of Saint Michael that tells me that I'm going the right way and I'm not lost. In another curiosity, this pilgrims used to wear a costume so they were pretty much dressed the same way.

Katy

Okay.

Paolo

Wearing also symbols in order to be recognized by everybody. Because if I have a restaurant and I see a pilgrim I have a special deal to offer for a pilgrim. If I have, like, a hostel, I can host them for a special price. But also, if I'm in a countryside and there is a group of bandits if they see us all dressed the same way, they know that we don't carry any money. So they don't have that because they recognize we dress like pilgrims. Right? So one of these symbols is the scallop shell that was used by pilgrims to drink. There's like a very famous pilgrimage in Europe that goes to Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Everywhere you go, you still see this

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symbol called Venera in Spanish everywhere. So that basically indicates that you're on the right path. It was really well organized.

Katy

Paolo, do we know how many pilgrims there were back then?

Paolo

It's hard to say. They have calculated that in Europe back then was something like 500,000 people, but it's hard to say. And we can assume that at least 10% have done travel like this. And we have for very extremely poor people that have also lost their lives along this way. From kings, from important people, rich family or businessmen traveling along. For instance, in Puglia, we had Saint Francis that also did a pilgrimage to go to talk to a Sultan that was occupying Jerusalem. We had important Emperors passing by. Every place has stories about famous people that has basically used the castles or hospitals to basically stop for one or two nights.

Katy

It's absolutely fascinating. I think that it must have been quite an amazing time as well to see all these people coming through. And I guess now we're more used to seeing different cultures. But back then it must have been quite exotic almost just to see all these different types of people coming in different languages being spoken and all of those things.

Paolo

Sure. And you know what I find really extremely fascinating is that we now are struggling to create a European identity. Like, for instance, not everybody agrees the idea that Christianity has an important role in making a European identity. But we've we forget about all these people that have traveled and that has created a very strong link that goes way beyond religion. I'm not saying that this is like a Christian thing because together with Christians so there were a lot of people traveling along this path. Again, we're a lot of businessmen where a lot of traders. And together with them I'm talking about Jewish people, I'm talking about Arab people as well. Because if you know that there is a lot of people moving along a specific line you want to be there because you know that that's the core of the business.

Katy

Of course.

Paolo

If you remember, I told you about this line called the Saint Michael's Line, that is basically a line that connects all the most ancient and famous places dedicated to Saint Michael the

Archangel. Starting from a place very remote southwest of Ireland called Skellig Michael, it's a little island. If you go there, you see a structure built with bright stone walls that is dramatically similar to what we call Trulli houses in Alberobello. So a house with a conical rooftop and you find similar structures in southern France or in Turkey, basically along this itinerary. If you go still in Puglia to a place called Taranto, famous for big processions, the major saint of Taranto, the patron saint, is actually an Irish saint. Amazing. It's amazing. The connection that was developed along this line is amazing. If you come to Puglia and see some of these churches built during these centuries, it's churches basically created with many of the Normans families, that ruled southern Italy. The Normans were essentially Vikings that served there in England, then in France, and then for adventure, for becoming richer, they decided to follow this business of the pilgrimages and decided to settle down in south of Italy as well.

Paolo

So looking at the architecture in Bari or even like a completely remote and unknown place called Acerenza, which is lost in the countryside now, you find architecture that is exactly similar to something that you can see in France or in Jerusalem. When they filmed film about Jerusalem, they picked Matera as a location because Matera looks like Jerusalem for so many reasons geographically, but also for the architecture.

Katy

Yeah, I think these connections and all of this, I don't know why human beings are fighting these connections because they're already there and they have been there for centuries. We've been already working together, like you say, trading, talking, building. And I don't know why we fight this history. It seems kind of crazy to me.

Paolo

Yeah, I think it's simply because we forget, we don't study or we don't know enough about our own history. I don't want to spoil this to everybody, but think about pizza. Pizza, like the most iconic food that Italy has. We are super proud of our pizza, but the word pizza comes from a Greek word which is pita. Pita bread. So basically the shape, the round and flat shape of our pizza comes from Greece. That thing is basically completely isolated in Europe, there's always like a connection or something that reminds you some other places.

Katy

Absolutely. It's so fascinating, I could listen to you talk about it for hours. But you know what? What I think is really interesting as well is that these routes are still available to people today, aren't they? To experience this for themselves. So can you tell us a little bit about how people can experience these pilgrim routes that go around Puglia in particular?

Paolo

Yeah. There is a series of projects that have started and I want to say anything wrong but I think something like ten years ago became like viral especially during COVID because people are so scared of being in crowded places looked for hiking adventures and things in remote areas so now it's becoming more and more popular basically there's like a project of basically making available this Francigena way all the way from Calais basically in northern France all the way to Rome and then Jerusalem. These organizations and these projects are actually connected but at the same time independent. So at the minute if you want to travel from Calais to Rome you can follow a very organized path. I shared with you the link of this organization and you can get also what is called the credentials so it's like a piece of paper where you can get stamped in every single place where you stop they validate your itinerary. So at the end you have this paper with all the stamps which is also like a piece of art at the end, that basically certified the fact that you have traveled along this itinerary. And it's becoming like a new business again because there are shops opening along these itineraries, there is a new bed and breakfast that offer special discounts to pilgrims. Also restaurants offering like set menus for travelers.

Paolo

And you can do that walking like hiking it's on asphalt but very like back roads with very little cars passing by or on gravel so really like trails but you can also do it on bicycle. There's a lot of cyclists that love to do that and I'm really fascinated because I'm a keen cyclists as well. So you can do like bike packing, that's how it's called bike packing with very small bags attached to your bike. You basically travel for - if you walk for 20 to 30 km per day, if you cycling you can do 50 to 100 km if you want and it's fascinating because along the way you find a lot of people they all say Buen Camino in Italian which is basically enjoy your walking. There is a lot of signs now built by the local government so it's easy to follow but there's also GPS. GPX is actually the name of the file that you can download so you can follow the itinerary you can do it completely on your own so like you can start your own adventure or you can ask your local companies to help you along - with luggage for instance. So if you want to travel without carrying your own bags, you can ask companies to take care of it delivering from one hotel to the next one you can do it all. So from France to Jerusalem or you can do just a little portion.

Paolo

So I was telling you the first section from Calais to Rome it's completely available, works very well. The one from Rome to Brindisi is recently been recognized by European Union. It's three or four different itineraries. You can choose which way you want to take. There's already a lot of signs. They're still working on it, so it's a bit more adventurous if you want to do that. But there's a lot of websites, a lot of information that you can find on the internet that gives you information if you want to travel this way. It's fascinating because you explore areas where tourists regularly don't go. It's still not affected by what we call now over-tourism. So you can visit the real country, you can meet people. And I noticed that locals love to see you. They are extremely friendly and helpful and they want to help you because they see you kind of

gaining your trip, like suffering and experiencing some fatigue. So they offer you water, they offer you wine. There's a lot of people that invite you to share a meal or just sometimes for a drink because they admire you along this journey.

Paolo

So it's really fascinating. We also had one which is the same style of this major one. It's a local company, but it's not really a company - it's a group of friends that has decided to create a series of itineraries in Puglia - essentially going from Bari to Matera. This is called the Camino Materano. I also shared the link with you. So, again, you can do like a very epic multi days itinerary, but you can also do just a weekend, or you can decide to stay in a place that you like, with the pool, for instance, for like a week and then two days hike along this itinerary. So it's really open to your imagination and to your creativity.

Katy

It sounds absolutely wonderful. And I think you're right, these smaller places that haven't seen too many English speaking people, that it's a really special experience. And one of the good things about Puglia, and I'm just saying this, is it's quite flat. So for anyone who's worried about going, like whether I have to go up mountains and what have you, it's actually Puglia is pretty flat. So I wouldn't say it's too stressful for people who want to get out and enjoy it, but they don't need to be doing the Tour de France outdoors, mountain style climbing.

Paolo

That's true, that's true. I worked with a cycling company. Basically, they decided to launch like, a new itinerary in Puglia, talking about the 90s, when Puglia was clearly undiscovered. Simply looking on a map and noticing that it was flat. So they said, oh, this is a perfect place for cycling - people that don't want to struggle up on the mountains.

Katy

Yeah, but I mean, it is so beautiful. And even within Puglia, the landscape changes a lot too. So you have a very different experience from one part of the region to the next.

Paolo

It's true. It's something that I advertise a lot because it's true. Like, if you want to, let's say, go from Matera where I live, that's why I'm keeping saying Matera to Lecce, where I'm from. It's a road, like, by car is an hour and 45 minutes. But you can plan stopping along the way in several places. So you can start in Matera. It is a town made of caves. Then after less than an hour, you stop in Alberobello, which is this place full of houses with this conical rooftop, really neat. Then you travel another less than an hour and you're in Ostuni, which is a town, completely white. All the houses are whitewashed. And then you get to Lecce, where everything is baroque and all the buildings are full of decorations and the balconies are super

ornate. And it's really unbelievable how everything changes. Even food is different. You can find some similarities, of course, but every single place has a local specialty. For instance, in Matera, they make special sun dried pepper that is deep fried. You don't find in Lecce. In Lecce, we cook pasta with pieces of pasta, deep fried, cooked with chickpeas. That is typical of Lecce. In Bari, they make a pasta with homemade, always in the shape of a little ear - Orecchiette, it's called, with broccoli and anchovies unique to Bari.

Katy

It so good. Don't forget the bread. There's different bread everywhere too.

Paolo

It's true. And probably like an English speaking people person, won't really notice that, but if I speak my dialect in Lecce and I go to Bari, we don't understand each other. It's really like two completely different languages. Even if I talk Italian, I have such a strong accent that they basically immediately tell me, you're from Lecce, right?

Katy

Oh, my goodness.

Paolo

Yeah.

Katy

That's really interesting. What sort of an accent is it? It's really interesting from an Australian perspective. I always wonder how people sound speaking Italian that are Australian or English or American. If they sound different.

Paolo

Yeah. Let me try. I'm picking two extreme areas, like Sicily. As a Sicilian person in English, we'll talk very slowly, something like, hi, how are you? I'm from Sicily. This is my accent. And I sound like this. Kind of tired of talking. If you go to Bari, they speak much faster and they usually don't finish the words. They say, I'm from Bari, and they change also the sounds of the vowels. You want an example? The word Madonna. Like Virgin Mary. They say Madonna. They are very colorful people also.

Katy

Yes.

Paolo

So we have a word in Italian that probably doesn't exist in English. It's *campanilismo*, if you want to translate it. It's like bell tower-ism. We are affected by this, so we're so proud and so focused on our own bell tower. We walk to another town where there's another bell tower. We feel like we have to fight somehow or we have to protect our own identity. So there's a lot of competition between all these cities. And Lecce hates Bari and Bari hates Lecce. There's a lot of soccer, football, you know, rivalry. And it's like a lot of people like insulting each other in a fun way.

Katy

I love that there's a word for it because that's one of the things I love about Italy, like wherever you go, it's like, "no, we have the best olive oil." And I'm like, yeah, come on "no WE have the best coffee, WE have the best wine". I'm like "ok, ok"

Paolo

You were in Matera - talk about people, about bread with people in Matera. Oh, Matera bread is the best in the world. Then you go to your village, which is 15 km away, they make exactly the same bread, but they say that it's different and they say that it's much better than the one in Matera.

Katy

I love it though, just so much passion. And again, to come full circle to where we started. It's the pride. It's the pride in the local community, the pride in everything about what they do, what they make, what they talk about, their football team, what they eat. It's a really special thing. And I think sometimes when we think about Italy that's become more modernized, I guess you don't get that whole sense of feeling and that sense of community, which is what I really did feel when I was in Puglia. And you do get that sense of people joining together to be proud of their countryside and everything that they've created. And I just love those little towns where they all got together and decorated in such a way - just very unique, very subtle as well. Although I have to say I always say this, Locorotondo wins Christmas every year. I mean, I don't understand why everyone's going to Germany and Austria to go for Christmas. You should go to Locorotondo because they decorate the town. It's so beautiful. I've only seen it in pictures, but I'm going. Because I love Christmas.

Paolo

Do you know about the contest they organize in Locorotondo?

Katy

No. You better tell us, Paolo.

Paolo

It's a contest for the best balcony or the best courtyard. So each family decorates the balcony or the courtyard with a lot of flowers and plants. And each one has a little number. So if you're going into the Locorotondo, you can notice that there's like a wooden plate with a number on and there's like a jury basically gives awards for the best balcony or the best courtyard. And so it's fascinating because every time you go, you see so much flowers and plants everywhere.

Katy

But it's really done in a stylish way. So I don't like where we are, people would go into that. And I'm saying mean things about my country, but it might be a bit garish, it wouldn't be like stylish or considered. But this is really beautiful and you just get a really calm sense of peaceful - and because of all the buildings are whitewashed and you've got the green plants and the flowers.

Paolo

I don't know if like in English there is this word, but we say that is Instagrammable.

Katy

Yes, we do.

Paolo

Everybody like when it decorates now, they always think of somebody taking a picture, so they always calculate everything to give a photo opportunity.

Katy

Well, I don't think you have to try very hard in Puglia, I have to say. I have so many photos that are so going on my Instagram. Now, Paolo, before I forget, can you help people? If people want to explore these pilgrim routes, can you help them do that?

Paolo

Sure. I work as a tour guide, so people can easily get in touch with me and I actually love to plan itineraries specific for people's desires or needs. They can ask me to have a multiple day. I can be with them if they want, so I can guide them around, helping them to pick a restaurant or helping them to choose the hotel. I'm not a travel agency, so I don't make reservations, but let's say I can work as a consultant and a tour guide, so that's what I do, basically.

Katy

I've had some of Palo's restaurant recommendations and let me tell you, that's very good. Yeah, definitely reach out. So how can people reach out to you, Paolo? Let them know.

Paolo

They can reach me on social media, like Facebook or Instagram, or through my website. The website is www.apuliahandmade.it or my name, Paolo Maragliulo, on LinkedIn. On Instagram, I'm the only one with this last name. Very complicated.

Katy

How do you spell it?

Paolo

It's M-A-R-A-G-L-I-U-L-O-I can show you all my mails that I get where my name is always wrong

Katy

Oh, dear. Well. We're going to put them (hopefully spelled correctly) into the show notes. Everything there. So that everyone can find you. Because honestly, yeah definitely everyone. You need to reach out to Paolo because it's a really special part of the world and I just don't think if you don't have someone there to guide you, whether that's in terms of your itinerary or even on the ground, helping you understand. Because not everyone speaks a lot of English over there as well. So it's very useful to have someone with you that speaks great English and great Italian and you'll get a deeper experience if you do it that way. If you don't speak a lot of Italian, I think it's really worthwhile going with a guide like Paolo to experience some of those things, because I went with someone who spoke Italian and really, if I hadn't gone with Olivia, it would have been a completely different experience, I think. I wouldn't have got to try the delicious mozzarella cheese with pistachios, which I saw being made, and then they just handed it to me and I had to eat it. It was very tough job, I got to say, but it was like these type of things. I wouldn't have been able to understand what was happening and all of those things and all of the symbols etc. Oooh, now, Paolo, before we finish up. Can you tell everyone which this is the thing that really blew my mind about some of these pilgrim trails. I just remembered there's a connection, isn't there, between King Arthur of the Knights of the Round Table and Bari? I just was like, this is crazy.

Paolo

Actually Bari, Brindisi and also Otranto - if you visit the main church to Saint Nicholas in Bari on the side entrance, there is a relief on top of it that tells a little episode about King Arthur. Same as in Brindisi, there is a church dedicated to St. John the Baptist on the way to Jerusalem. And there's also on the portal, King Arthur again. And in Otrando, there's a beautiful floor mosaic built during the Norman time with King Arthur again. And the

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connection is basically thanks to the Normans. So it's the Norman that brought this culture all the way to Puglia, which is so unexpected.

Katy

It's just incredible. And I think that's a legend. It's an Anglo Saxon Norman legend that maybe we grew up with as kids when we're coming from those English speaking backgrounds. And to find that in Puglia yeah, you're right. It's so unexpected. I just love those connections and the fact that people have been connected for such a long time. And we should celebrate that, really. Anyway, Paolo, grazie for sharing all these wonderful stories of Puglia with everyone today. Thank you so much for joining us on Untold Italy. And will you promise to come back? Because you've got so much more to tell us.

Paolo

Whenever you want. I had so much fun talking to you. Whenever you want to invite me, I'm available. Thank you very much.

Katy

Wonderful grazie mille.

Paolo

Prego, prego.

Katy

Listeners, you know the best thing about our podcast is that I get to learn so many amazing things about Italy and the world in general and also meet people with deep local knowledge like Paolo. It blew my mind when I heard about St Michael's line and the common threads that bind people that live along this old pilgrim trail over many centuries. And I just had to share this with you all. I hope you enjoyed our chat.

Very soon our first guests on our Untold Italy small group tours will begin their adventures in Puglia and Matera and I couldn't be more excited for them to experience the magic of this lesser known region of Italy. We have so much fun in store for them - from beautiful Baroque Lecce to the trulli towns of the Valle d'Itria and fishing villages along the coast. Of course hearing local stories and tales and eating amazing food along the way. We're sold out for 2022 but have some space left for 2023 - head on over to tours.untolditaly.com for all the details.

As always, we've provided Paolo's details and all the places mentioned in our comprehensive show notes at untolditaly.com/135 for episode 135. We provide these notes so you can relax and listen to the episode. Plus it can be tricky trying to jot down Italian names when you're on the go. I'm sure you'll agree.

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That's all for today, next week I'm going to share some tips on how to manage your travel itinerary in Rome when it's super hot, but until then it's... "ciao for now".