

Untold Italy Episode 136 - How to Enjoy Your Time in Rome When it's Super Hot

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 136.

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

Listeners - I hope you're all doing well. And if you're in the Northern Hemisphere, you're having a lovely summer. Now, I have just recently returned from Rome, and what I thought I'd do today is something a little bit different and it's a little bit more off the cuff than what I would normally do, but I wanted to share with you some quick tips on how to handle being in Rome when it's really hot.

Katy

Now, Rome is an amazing city and I love being there, but it can be completely stifling when the temperatures rise. And for most of you may or may not know that I had recently returned. And what I found was some quick ways to make the most of your time. And really, if you're not someone who really enjoys traveling in the heat, then this might be a good one for you to listen to. Because actually, I don't like traveling in the heat. And I thought I planned my trip beautifully for early June, but it didn't happen to be the case. So what happened this year was there was an extreme heatwave that's continuing now into August. And let's hope that later in September that things start to cool down because it has been extremely hot for a very long time. So we're talking temperatures into the mid to late 30s Celsius. And I believe in Fahrenheit, that's in the 90s, so you can imagine that that is pretty hot.

Katy

Now, everyone handles heat differently. I don't particularly like being stuck outdoors in the beating sun. I've got quite pale skin and I just feel very uncomfortable. But that being said, some people love it and good for you. You can go and enjoy Rome. It's probably a good time for you to travel then, because usually in August, when it is super, super hot, people try and avoid the city at that stage. So there's something you really need to know about Rome - and so, like I said, everyone handles heat differently, but Rome does retain the heat. So when you're talking about temperatures in the 30s or 90s Fahrenheit, you're talking about the city that's made of stone, that's retaining all the heat of the day and the sun beating down on it,

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and we're talking about 15 or 16 hours of sunlight. So it's a stone city and there's not a lot of trees around, so you've got all the heat being absorbed. And apart from that, so that's outside and the building are radiating heat. The air conditioning is probably not as powerful as we are used to in some other countries, particularly the United States and Australia, where we like to have our air con on and quite cool, to cool us down. We actually had a situation in one place where they had set the air conditioning to 25 degrees, I'd actually call that heating, but that's because in Italy at the moment, the fuel prices and the power prices have risen really substantially, up to 50%. So I can understand they were trying to manage some of their costs, but basically what it says to you is that the air conditioning is not something that we're used to here. So maybe in like a five star hotel you can expect that. But if you're staying in accommodation that's not as fancy, please just expect that the air conditioning might not be what you're used to.

Katy

The other thing that's worth noting is that when we are sightseeing and traveling and out and about, it's very different to normal life. So I'm not sure if you're like me, but when it's a hot day, we tend to go out and do things in the early morning and sort of hunker down inside when it's really hot, in our air conditioning and then go out later in the evening. And so that might not be possible for our trips when we're going around and sightseeing on our dream trip to Italy. So it's just something to think about when we are planning our trips and preparing for a trip that's in the summertime or when it's likely to be hot in Rome.

Katy

What I wanted to do is just give you that overview and make sure that you understand that it could be pretty hot, especially if you're planning a trip for next year or it's coming up in the next few weeks. So I wanted to give you some top tips about how to manage it being really, really hot in Rome.

Katy

So my first tip is to choose your accommodation wisely. By that I mean you need to work out a place to stay that's not too far from everything, because you want to be able to either walk or grab a taxi when you need to. I say this a lot on this podcast, and I think for first time visitors and for most people when they're visiting Rome, the central areas of the city around the Pantheon, Piazza Navona and around Campo de' Fiori are the best areas to say we have a whole other podcast episode on this particular topic and some resources, and we'll add that into the show notes. But basically, if you stay in the old town, in centro histórico, you're really able to move around fairly easily and get back to your accommodation quickly. Now, as I mentioned, the air conditioning can be problematic, but I think in summer you really do need to look for air conditioning when you're choosing your accommodation, and you can easily do that. We exclusively used booking.com for our accommodation in the last trip, and you can easily go through their search engine and make sure you've got air conditioning. Some people, me included, and my family, would like to have a pool in summer. Now, unfortunately,

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there aren't too many hotels with pools in Rome, and they're generally confined to the five star hotels and they may be a little bit further out of the city because there's just really no room for swimming pools in those hotels. So I will add a few suggestions of hotels with pools into the show notes. But do expect to pay quite a bit more if you want a swimming pool in your accommodation. So that's my first tip - accommodation selected carefully and make sure you have air conditioning.

Katy

The second tip is to plan your days very carefully. And when you're planning your activities, really look to what you would do in summer when you're at home. And so what we did is we switched a few things around and we ended up getting up very early to do some sightseeing. We would rest in the middle of the day and head out again in the evening. When I say early, some of the best moments that we had in Rome, we're getting up at around 6.30/7, even earlier, if you can, to be honest, and going out and going to see some of the sites that you really need to see on foot. So an example of that is the Trevi Fountain, Piazza Navona, the Pantheon, and outside the Pantheon, in the beautiful piazza there and the Spanish Steps. So all of those places get very crowded and very hot during the day. So if you can get up early and go and have a look at those places, not only will you get those coveted people free photos that you're looking for, but also you can use up your energy in the day when it's relatively cooler and you can do the walking, get it out of the way, and maybe sit down in a beautiful cafe and have your breakfast. That's my first tip about planning your days.

Katy

Then we get on to the major sites and I think we did a few of these things because I can't resist going to the Colosseum when I'm in Rome. It's a really amazing place and there's always something new to explore. But the thing with the Colosseum is it gets super hot. When you think about it, it's a stone structure with the sun beating down on it with very little shade. And when you're there, if you're doing a tour, you'll find out what the Romans used to do for shade, which was a series of sails, which is really fascinating, actually, how they managed to rig those up. But anyway, if you're going to the Colosseum, usually people try and go as early as possible, which means those tickets are in hot demand. The Colosseum opens at 09:00 in the morning and you can buy your tickets about three to four weeks in advance. If you book your tickets in advance, you have to be pretty organized to do that. Otherwise you can book a tour and you can book your tour in early. It really is very advisable to have a morning tour when you can go when it's slightly cooler. The other option is to do an evening tour, but they're very limited. The thing is that at that site, I also want to make sure you take a lot of water with you and a bottle that you can refill at some of the fountains there. We witnessed quite a few people with heat exhaustion when we were there in June and I felt really sorry for them actually - wouldn't have been very pleasant experience. So that's the Colosseum, which usually includes access to the Forum and the Palatine Hill, which are amazing sites, but again, they're also completely exposed. So make sure you bring your water bottle and your hat and book as early as you can.

Katy

The other major site in Rome that you'll probably be visiting is the Vatican Museums. Now this is a huge site and it's not very well cooled. In fact, I don't know that there's air conditioning in many of the galleries there except for the Sistine Chapel. So once again, I would recommend going as early as possible to avoid the crowds and the heat that's generated by those crowds as well. It really can be quite unpleasant during the summer. If you have those tickets and a tour, you can actually avoid standing outside, which you will need to stand outside for a little bit if you're going into St. Peter's to pass the security line - so what that means is we didn't wait too long. It was about 20 minutes, but I had my children with me and got some great photos of their whining faces, shall we say. And the lining up in the heat is really hot and there's not a lot of shade. So just be aware and plan and make sure you have lots of water and a hat.

Katy

The other place where I would recommend pre booking tickets when it's really hot is the Pantheon. So on the weekend you do need to pre book tickets to enter the Pantheon currently. So make sure you get that so you don't have to stand outside in a hot line waiting to get in. Okay. So they're by planning your days well - and of course we've got quite a few links to that on our website, particularly around buying tickets for the Colosseum, etc. So we'll add those into the show notes.

Katy

The next point I wanted to make is - choose some activities that are more suited to a hot environment. So there's a few that are out there that are really, really great. The first one is a golf cart tour. Now, I met with one of our partners Liv tours and I was asking about the golf cart tour and I don't mind telling you, well, this is something - but I actually thought the golf cart tour was for people that are a little bit lazy. Well, my bad. I'm sorry about that everyone, but apparently Christine told me, no, no, no Katy, you have to come on one because it's actually a great way to see parts of the city that you couldn't generally reach without a vehicle, particularly on foot. So you would get taken to views from Trastevere and other neighborhoods that you can get around quite quickly if you have a vehicle. And especially it's great in that sense because someone else is driving and you don't have to worry about the traffic or negotiating pedestrians and all of that type of thing. So a golf cart is an excellent idea and usually they run both during the day and they've also I know Liv Tours have got a great one that includes aperitivo, so I will be putting that into the show notes for you all. And of course, Liv Tours offers our listeners a lovely discount with the code Untold. It's really a 5% so you can access that too.

Katy

The other type of tour, which is really good, it doesn't involve so much walking, is obviously a Segway tour. These are quite fun. I am the type of person that likes to be balanced and have my feet on solid ground, so I haven't actually tried this one, but I know a lot of people like getting around on Segways and it would really save a lot of energy in the heat of the day by going on a Segway tour. And they are lots of fun. I think people who enjoy that type of adventure activity really enjoy getting around. And again, you can cover so much more ground than you can when you're on foot.

Katy

And the last activity that I was going to suggest is you can do night tours, including walking tours, food tours, and just doing activities that are out of the heat of the day. And it doesn't even have to be a tour, you can just go for a lovely walk along the Tiber and just watch the lights flickering against the river and it's just really lovely. And in fact, when you're there in summer, they usually have a lovely kind of pop up event that's happening along the river near Trastevere and there's lots of bars and restaurants and you can just enjoy the atmosphere walking along there and maybe stop for a drink and enjoy because the evening is really special in Rome and why not?

Katy

So speaking of hydration, and maybe not wine in this case, but in the heat of the day, you really need to make sure you're drinking a lot of water and significantly more than what you would when you're at home. I just feel like we had about four liters of water a day and it was really, really necessary because we were doing probably around 20,000 steps as a minimum. So you just need to make sure that you don't get dehydrated and you do drink a lot of water. So in Rome it's excellent because what you can do is you can take your bottle of water or bottle around and you can fill it up at free public fountains all around the city. And they're called Nasoni and these public fountains have been around for centuries and keeping the Romans hydrated throughout summer, winter and throughout the centuries. So it's very, very safe to drink. And I actually find it delicious and very refreshing. And so you just need to have a bottle that you can refill. And I just think it's much more environmentally friendly than buying countless bottles of water and do your bit for the environment. Grab your bottle and fill up at the Nasoni or the water fountains. And it's really a great thing to do. I think it's a great Roman thing to do. And shall I tell you how to work it? You need to put your finger over one of the holes, but you can end up squirting people quite a lot too, so just be aware of who's around you.

Katy

The next tip that I want to share with everyone is to dress appropriately. So in our Facebook group, which is called Italy Travel Planning, there's a lot of conversations about how to dress, whether you should dress like the Romans do or dress as Italians do or whatever. I say dress

how you would like to dress, but please make sure you have got the following a really nice wide rimmed hat in the summer. Loose and light clothing is also really great, so everyone's different, but I don't recommend wearing jeans or anything like that - you're just going to absolutely swelter. If you're wearing anything that's too heavy - even if you're used to wearing maybe jeans in summer where you are from. I mean, it's really humid in Rome, so it can be really uncomfortable if you're wearing denim. That's just my opinion. But I do think that dressing with loose and light layers is probably going to be your most comfortable attire. The other thing you might like to think about bringing is like a small hand fan. I just like a normal one. You can get a battery operated one, but you can have a little fan. And when you're standing in line, you can just fan yourself. And a little tip is also to have a little small spray bottle. You can get those little travel size ones, just fill it up with a bit of water and you can spray yourself too.

Katy

The last tip is also to bring your sunscreen. I am a mum and I have a little red headed daughter and she will probably burn very easily, but she does burn very easily. So to avoid all that, make sure you've got plenty of sunscreen. If you forget, it's available in any of the little supermarkets around the city and you can just pick some up. It can be quite expensive, but I think it's worth it. No one wants to have their vacation ruined by sunburn.

Katy

So now we're suitably attired. My next tip for you is to stop for lots of rest. And the good news is that Rome is full of many places you can go and stop at and enjoy delicious Roman food stuffs - pizza, maritozzo, which is a cream filled bun and all of these delicious foods that you will find in Rome. And you will find that many of the cafes and restaurants are air conditioned. So it's just a great excuse to just duck in there and just have a little break, have a nice drink and recuperate for the next part of your day outing.

Katy

Rome shops as well - also air conditioned, I would try along the Via del Corso, which is the main shopping street in Rome. So if you just need a break, sometimes you just need just some cool air on your skin. In these hot days, that's a really great place to go. But also my favorite one, and this is a top tip for all of you is Rinascente, and that is a department store, an Italian department store, and it's a chain of department stores, but in Rome it is a really big one. And not only do they have an amazing rooftop, which might be a bit sunny and hot, but it's also like a big space and it's got lots of shops and you can go wandering around and testing out all those Italian brands. So, yes, stop for rest, whether that be in cafes, restaurants or shops, and just take your time. There's no need to rush. Piano, piano, as the Italians say.

Katy

The next tip is to spend some more time indoors, but these are indoor activities that might not be so crowded. And so I just wanted to mention a few in particular that you might want to enjoy and schedule into your time or have them as a backup if you're just getting too hot and you just want to have a break and just wander around somewhere lovely. So a few of the places that I went to and revisited on my recent trip to Rome included the Capitoline Museums, which are full of all of the amazing artefacts that have been pulled from sites around Rome. And you can just wander around the galleries and you're out of the sun and just admire all of those things. It's got the famous statue of Romulus and Remus and the She Wolf mother that is obviously the founding brothers of Rome. Twin brothers of Rome. And one part of the Capitoline museums that most people don't even get to is you actually have to go underground. And below the main piazza, that's part of the complex there, and you get to the other side of the museums, and there's some fantastic and absolutely huge marble statues there, including fountains, which are really worth exploring. So definitely check out the Capitoline Museums if you're hot and bothered. That's just behind the Roman forum and next to Piazza Via Venezia.

Katy

Okay, the next place I wanted to mention is the Doria Pamphilj Gallery, and that's not far from the Capitoline Museums, actually, and it's an absolutely stunning residence. Former residence. Well, actually, I think the family lives in part of the apartments there, but the galleries that are open to the public are absolutely stunning. And there's usually nobody in there. There's a hall of mirrors and it's a very opulent and beautifully decorated gallery, which you can spend several hours wandering around. And there's actually a really nice cafe and a place for aperitivo there too, which is some of my recent discoveries that I quite enjoyed when I was in Rome and the last indoor activity.

Katy

And this one you do have to pre book is at the Borghese Gallery and they really strictly monitor the numbers there and move people around so that you have a lot of space to enjoy the art. So it's not like the Vatican Museums, which is a bit like a sausage machine during the day. But the Borghese galleries are beautifully laid out and organized. And what I was really impressed with is - what they do is that they sort of monitor all the traffic going around the gallery and they'll tell the tour guide, if you're with a guide, that they have to go and start at a different room. So that they might be starting on floor one room for the first tour that they do of the day. And the next tour they might be starting on floor two room G. And so they have to completely change their delivery of the tour. And I'm so amazed by those tour guides there. It's really phenomenal. I actually, again, I went with Liv tours there and big shout out to Marco, our guide there. Absolutely incredible guide with amazing storytelling skills. And he was one of the highlights of my trip to Italy. Actually. Because he really did an incredible job of bringing the story of the artwork in the Borghese Gallery to light and weaving in the tales of the owners of the paintings and all the intrigue and mysteries around how the pieces came

to be in the gallery and who the collectors were was a very wonderful tour and I highly recommend that if you're interested in baroque art - which I am.

Katy

Okay, my 8th tip is around your demeanour. And everyone's a little bit grumpy when they're too hot, I think. Anyway, you need to be a little bit patient because when it's hot and it's crowded, everyone is a little bit on edge. And I just think we just need to, again, relax and enjoy our surroundings and also consider your tour guides. We were with one guide in the Colosseum and she had done a three hour tour with us in the extreme heat of the day, and she was doing another three hour tour straight after. And what was amazing about this guide is she was so kind and so careful, and she really made an effort to make sure everyone was hydrated and had a lot of water to drink and adapted the tour for the situation. She was always finding bits of shade, which is quite difficult to do, and adapting the tour for the conditions and for the people that were on there. Because sometimes when you have small children or teenagers, they don't have maybe the tolerance levels that some of us adults have. So, big respect to all of the tour guides out there at the moment. I know they've had a very long summer and we're still several weeks to go, so patience and being relaxed as much as you can is going to help the days go much nicer.

Katy

But I think the last thing is the most important thing, and that is gelato. You're in Italy. You're in Rome. I don't think there's too many gelatos you can have in the summer. Just go for it. It's delicious, it's tasty, and it's cool. And you can stop at - I have my favorites, and I'm going to tell you one of them now, and that's Giolitti, and that's not far from the Pantheon. I will put a link into the show notes for you. But Giolitti is an amazing old school ice cream parlor where you need to go and pay at the bar first. So you need to say - I want a cone with two scoops, and then you pay at the bar. And then you take your ticket up to the counter and you order your flavors. And it's a beautiful place. You can actually sit down inside, too, if you like, but it's nice and it's cavernous, so it's cool inside there, too. So make sure you eat lots of gelato and enjoy every last bite.

Katy

So listeners, that's my plan for managing hot days in Rome. As I mentioned, this is not the climate I prefer to travel in but sometimes we don't have a choice or the situation is thrust upon us

Rome is magnificent and worth exploring whatever the weather so go armed with our tips and you're sure to have an amazing time. And, if all else fails, gelato makes everything ok. Especially pistachio, and lemon and raspberry. They're my favorites.

I mentioned a few places in this episode so of course we'll pop them into the show notes at untolditaly.com/136

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That's all for today, next week we're hoping to broadcast another of our very popular itinerary consultations with Feast Travel's Danielle Oteri and one of your fellow travelers but until then it's ... "ciao for now".