

Live itinerary consult - Tuscany focus

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 137.

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, buongiorno Italy lovers. Benvenuti and welcome to another episode of Untold Italy where we help solve real life travel problems for some of our listeners who are a little overwhelmed with all the information available and how to pull their ideas together into a cohesive travel plan.

We ran a similar session to this earlier in the year on episode 118 with my friend, expert travel planner Daniellle Oteri from Feast Travel, and it was so popular that we decided to do it again.

This time our travelers Laura and Ed want to visit Tuscany and have some specific requirements and things they definitely don't want to do. Danielle talks them through some options and gives them suggestions on how they can make their dream trip to Tuscany a reality. So Andiamo, let's get started.

Katy

Ciao! Buongiorno! Buena sera! Good morning. Good evening, wherever you are in the world. Thanks for joining us. I'm Katy, the founder of Untold Italy, a podcast, a small group tour company, an online resource for planning independent trips to Italy and host of the Italy travel planning community on Facebook. With me today is Danielle Oteri from Feast Travel and our follower Laura, who's planning a trip to Italy in the coming months. Now, every day at Untold Italy, we help thousands of travelers from all over the world plan their dream trip to Italy through independent research, but sometimes it can be bit overwhelming. There's just a ton of information and websites and offerings out there, and I know many of you are short on time and wish someone could give you informed answers based on their deep experience so that you can have the most amazing trip to Italy ever, the one that you've actually dreamed of. Now, earlier this year, we conducted a live trip consultation with one of our followers conducted by Danielle here from Feast Travel, who offer Italy travel planning services. This session was so popular that we've decided to make it a regular feature on all of our channels, so that includes our podcast, YouTube channel, and our Facebook group. So Danielle is back today to help Laura, and Ed is here too (hi Ed!) planned her upcoming trip and give you an

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insight into what it's like to hire a trip planner who has a ton of experience assisting people traveling in Italy. Danielle Bentornato, welcome back. Could you please introduce yourself and tell everyone about your background and experience?

Danielle

Thank you. Katy. Yeah. I'm a founder of Feast Travel, where we host group tours and we do itinerary consultations and custom itineraries and planning. My love and my passion is really South Italy. That's where my roots are, my business partner and also my family. Before that, an art historian. I worked for the medieval branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for 15 years. And so history is always has a special place in my heart - as well as food and wine, I also run a food tour company based in New York City called Arthur Avenue Food Tours. So bringing together all of my nerdy interests, my professional experience, and my big appetite, we usually try to do a good job to advise people on the best places to go in Italy.

Katy

It's always a pleasure to have Danielle here, and she's appeared many times on our podcast. Basically, we've got a lot of things in common, a love for food. I love Italy, a love for travel and history and art. So it's been a wonderful experience working with Danielle. Now I'm also joined by Laura and Ed, and they're planning their trip to Italy. So I'm just going to ask you to introduce yourselves and let us know a little bit about your trip and what you have hoped for your trip and maybe what the motivations were for planning a trip like this.

Laura

My name is Laura. This is my husband Ed. We live in Knoxville, Tennessee. We have two boys, 23 and 26. The 26 year old is moving to New York city next week. We're kind of foodies, I guess. He likes to smoke meat. We like to cook together. We like to have people over. It's always been kind of his dream to go to Italy, but we just really have not much knowledge about traveling in Italy. We kind of know what we don't want to do more than anything else.

Danielle

All right. So the way I like to do these consultations is we'll talk a little bit more about your trip, what it is you want to get out of it, you know, what you don't want. That's actually probably a pretty good place to start, and then we'll work through some ideas. Now, one of the reasons that when I was looking through the excel spreadsheet of the people who submitted their itineraries to be considered for this - was one of the most common things that I saw. I wanted to pick something that would answer as many questions as possible was - overwhelmed by the information. I saw so many people who probably throughout the pandemic, have been listening to Katy's podcast, which is a great source of information, reading blog posts, maybe looking at TikTok, which is not such good information. It seems like information overload is one of your challenges as well. So first, this is your first trip to Italy, right?

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Laura

Correct.

Ed

Yes

Katy

And as you said, what don't you want from this trip? Let's start there.

Ed

I don't want to go to Rome. I want to see the people in the countryside and experience the country. And I love history, but I don't want to be in a crowd.

Danielle

Don't want to be in a crowd, okay.

Laura

Don't want to traipse from museum to museum, I do not want to do that. Can I give you a little conversation bit that we had? I said, what do you want your trip to look like? And he said, I want to go to a little town, and I want an Italian grandma to teach me how to cook Italian food. And I was like, well, I don't really know how to schedule the Italian grandma for you. And when Katy talked about Arezzo at one time, and she said, you might be hard pressed to find someone that speaks english there. And I thought, oh, that sounds like a good place to go. Maybe a little bit problematic, but I don't know if that helps. But that's what we're looking for more of, like, an embedding in an area than to run around all over italy.

Danielle

Okay. How many different places would you want to see? Do you want to stay in one place the entire time, unpack your bags once, or do you want to move around to a few different places?

Ed

Well, I mean, we plan on getting a car so we can go day trips and do stuff

Laura

I think we would maybe want to be two or three nights at least in one place before we moved on. And I don't know if this has been in my mind, this is what the only thing we thought of so far is flying to Florence. Spend the night, get your bearings, get your car or whatever, go to

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Arezzo and stay there for two or three days and use that kind of as a base for visiting maybe some smaller local wineries or something like that.

Danielle

How long do you have altogether?

Laura

Two weeks.

Danielle

Two weeks. Do you want to stay in Tuscany the entire time?

Laura

That's kind of what we thought, but we don't have to. I would kind of like to see the coast.

Ed

We can fly to Croatia for a night.

Laura

I wouldn't mind to see a coastal area. He's not super keen on it, but I do think I would like that, if it's not too far.

Danielle

So cooking with a grandma, lots of good food, lots of good wine, small town where you can embed with the locals, maybe some beach, maybe some coast. And you're planning on leaving in October? Is that the idea?

Ed

If our passports get back?

Laura

No, it's starting to feel too last minute. So we could always hunt to spring if we have to.

Katy

Okay. For those who are watching or listening, Laura, let us know before that their passports have not yet arrived - so it's possible this trip may not happen this fall. But if it does happen, it would happen in October, right?

Laura

Right. Late October.

Danielle

Late October. Okay. So the good news is late October of this year is great. This summer has just been incredibly busy and popular and overwhelming crowds everywhere. And I'm hearing stories even in strange, unusual places for American tourists or non European tourists, it's been busy, except for the Cinque Terre, which in October is still beyond, beyond, beyond packed. It seems that many places are fairly available. So October is a great month to travel. It's a great month to travel anyway because the weather is gorgeous and it's cool and you still get warm days and cool nights. It's the harvest. So all of those wonderful things. So you know for sure, after listening to the podcast with Katy, Arezzo is one of your preferred location, right? And you said you're comfortable driving a car, right?

Ed

Yeah.

Danielle

Good. So there's a few things here that I'm going to just say that might not be specific to your situation, but just because I know that these are questions that other people have. In general, when you go to Tuscany, you really need to rent a car. Some people go to Tuscany to rent a villa and be with their friends and family and just, like, check out and have maybe some day trips planned. But if you want to explore the Tuscan countryside, you need to rent a car. The exception would be is if you're planning a specific vineyard day and you know that you want to really enjoy drinking, then you might want to book a driver for that night or stay at a winery, that sort of thing because the Tuscan hills, they're fairly rolling. They're not like some of the other places in Italy where the GPS stops working because the hills are so dramatic still, you don't want to be driving those even if you've had some wine, even just a little bit of wine. So that's great. And I definitely recommend, when you rent your car, to rent it outside of the city. So you said flying into Florence, even if you stay in Florence, rent the car at the airport so that you don't have to drive in Florence.

Laura

Is that a good place to fly into? Is that a good choice?

Danielle

It's a very small airport, so you might not find many options there. Pisa is a slightly bigger airport. If you're coming from Knoxville, I would imagine you're probably flying to somewhere on the East Coast, like New York or Boston, and then transferring. So usually Pisa is the bigger

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airport. There are some flights that go into Florence, but it's tiny. It's funny, you feel like you're being let off by the school bus when you get off in Florence. They drop you off, you walk off the plane across the tarmac. The major international airports are Milan and Rome. Naples has a smaller airport, but there are some international flights that go in there and there are others around Italy. But, yeah, generally Milan and Rome are the big international airports, so that also may be a factor in pricing as well. If you do have to fly into Rome, we're not going to make you go to Rome because you said you don't want to. But if you have to say, for example, you got a really great flight, you can take a fast train that's called the Frecciarossa from Rome to Florence. And it's about, I believe, an hour and 45 minutes.

Laura

So that would be worth it. Price was way better.

Danielle

Yeah.

Laura

You take the train from the airport?

Ed

You can catch it from the airport?

Danielle

From the airport, yes. So there's a really fantastic shuttle service from the Rome airport to the Rome train station called the Leonardo Express, and it's like 15 euro. It runs every 25 minutes. You don't have to buy a ticket at a time. Whenever you arrive, you follow the signs for the Leonardo Express. You take the train. There's a good coffee bar. Right after you buy your tickets, you get your first coffee in Italy, you have your first cornetto, and then you'll be within, I think it's about a 25 minutes ride into the main Rome train station. And that's where you can get all the train lines. There's the Italo train. Train Italia. But Frecciarossa is the fast train. Also a good tip? There is a hotel outside of the Rome airport that is also a spa. It's really nice. So I always say for people that are, like, returning. If you need to stay near the airport, there is like a Marriott and whatever in the airport itself, your flights at four in the morning, but there's also a spa airport, so if you need to have that first night to sleep it off and get a massage, you can go there as well. And then you could actually pick up a car at the Rome airport and drive north to Tuscany. And I would say also getting a car at the Rome airport, since you're comfortable driving - north to Tuscany would be a great option as well, because along the way, especially in southern Tuscany, there's a lot of really beautiful towns to see. So how about we talk about some of those other Tuscan towns that you might see? Arezzo, we know, and it's beautiful, and you can go see the Piero della Francesca frescoes there and

satisfy the art history requirement of going to Italy without having to actually go to a museum - you can see this beautiful cycle of paintings inside of a church. But I want to mention some of the other towns of Tuscany that I think are really worth a visit. They're of interest to you since you're wide open right now. One would be if you're driving south or if you're driving north from Rome, there's a town called Saturnia. It's pretty well known. It's a town where there's this whole series of hot springs, natural thermal hot springs, and you can pull off the side of the road and jump in if you want, which I did when I was much younger. Or you can go to a proper, like, sort of a beach club, and then there's a spa, and there's a hotel there as well, where you can go, and they have a beautiful restaurant and you can enjoy the hot springs. So Saturnia is a really wonderful place.

Danielle

Montepulciano, of course, is very, very famous for wine. And that's the place where I know, in particular what I'll do after this call, just so everybody knows, too, on the Itinerary consultation calls, we sort of talk through different ideas, and then afterwards I send you a document that has the names and the specific phone numbers and names so that you can go plan this afterwards. And you're not like, how do I spell that? I don't speak. But I do know a woman named Pamela Sheldon Johns who has a home. She's an American who's been living in Tuscany for 20/30 years, and she has an olive oil farm in Tuscany near Montepulciano, and it's gorgeous. And she has some rooms to stay. It's very simple. It's not a fancy resort or anything like that, but she's a cookbook author. Beautiful farm. Olive harvest. Olive Harvest will probably be over by October, but it's a real chance to see real Tuscany with people who obviously speak fluent English because they are originally American.

Laura

That sounds really great.

Danielle

Yeah. So I will send you her contact information for her place, which is called Poggio Etrusco. Further north in Tuscany, this would be almost to Florence, maybe just about an hour outside of Florence, there's a town called San Miniato. And there you'll find two things in particular that are really wonderful. So first of all, San Miniato is a town that's on this pilgrimage route, this ancient pilgrimage route that went to Rome called the Via Francigena. I will spell that for everybody's benefit because it probably just sounded like I sneezed F-R-A-N-C-I-G-E-N-A. So people may be familiar with the famous Santiago de Compostela, the pilgrimage route to Spain, but in Italy, it was the Via Francigena. And there's actually a lot of people now, because Santiago de Compostela is such a crowded, over-touristed pilgrimage, a lot of people are doing this one. So San Miniato in the Middle Ages was one of these pilgrimage stops. And there's a beautiful medieval tower there, a small medieval center of the town, but there's a winery there called Pietro Beconcini. Family-owned. Tuscan family. And then you're just situated on an ancient seabed. So when you walk around the grounds, you pick up - there's millions of these tiny little nautilus in the ground from when this was a prehistoric seabed.

So it's this beautiful place. It's got this fascinating history in the ground itself. And then Eva and Leonardo, who run it, are just lovely people. There's a lot of wineries in Tuscany that are similar to the experience that you might have, like in Napa Valley in California, where if anybody's ever seen that movie Sideways where the bus pulls up and there's just people drinking bad wine. There's a lot of that, for sure. This is like the family - they live in the house. You'll have a tasting inside the house. The one eyed cat will be running around, the kid is there. It's a real, true experience. So when you said you want to embed with real people and get to.

Laura

That's definitely more like what we're looking for.

Danielle

For, yeah, this would be a great place. And what's so interesting and why I bring up the whole pilgrimage path is they also have a wine there that's a Tempranillo, which is a wine from Spain, a grape from Spain, I should say. And they found it growing feral in their vineyard because it was brought by the monks in the Middle Ages as they were pilgrims from Spain. So it's one of these places where, like, history and food and wine and beautiful people and the Tuscan landscape, everything that looks like an olive oil and kind of clicks together.

Laura

That sounds good.

Danielle

My husband is just home and loves this wine, He is in the background. We can bring him in later if you want to talk more about it.

Laura

Well, don't tell them that we bought our Italian wine from the grocery store tonight, so don't even know what it is.

Katy

All right, so let me keep going with some more options. We got Montepulciano, of course. We have Saturnia. We have San Miniato. And then another town that I really like is called Pietrasanta, and it's closest to Lucca. It's a small, beautiful town that, like all, was Tuscany, a beautiful walled medieval village and very close to the Carrara marble caves where Michelangelo is the source of marble. And one of the cool things you can do in that area also is do a jeep tour of the Carrara marble caves, which Katy and I have this running thing. We always like to scratch the Indiana Jones itch. You definitely feel that if you do one of those Jeep tours. But the city of city of Pietrasanta itself has a ton of sculptures and bronze

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workers and just a lot of contemporary artists. So it's another place where it has a deep medieval and Renaissance history, but there are all these contemporary artists that live there as well, and there's art all over the city.

Laura

We saw that on TV. It looked amazing.

Danielle

Yeah, it's really amazing. And it doesn't seem to be that - I mean there's tourism there, but not as much as you see in Cortona, the places that are very famous. But Pietrasanta is beautiful, and I really feel like a lot of Tuscany can sometimes feel kind of precious, and a lot of the history can be sort of overwhelming. Like, people will say to you, wow, Charles the 8th was here, and most Americans are going to be like, Great. Is he related to George Washington? Who's that? Tuscans are very proud, rightfully so, about their history. But it can be a little dry at times if you're not deeply familiar with it. Even for me, having studied it, I went to graduate school in Florence. Even. Sometimes I'm like, okay, but it's a Pietrasanta where art is still being made, it's still vibrant, and you can be part of that experience. And there's some fantastic restaurants. There some actually more high end places. So you can certainly have lots of more rustic meals in all of these places. But if you want to go out for a really nice dinner, there's a couple of higher end restaurants in Pietrasanta that I would recommend. All right, so how does that all sound to you?

Laura

That sounds great. I have kind of looked into a few cooking schools. Like, I don't know if you call it a school, but cooking experiences where you kind of stay in one place for a couple of days and you do some cooking with some other people. Do you think that's a good option?

Danielle

It depends on how deep you want to go. There's a lot of different kinds of cooking classes, in Italy in general. There's some that where people will come to your house. There's some where people will really dig into, like, one specific kind of food. Generally, if there's a connection to somebody in particular. Sorry, my dog is playing with a squeak toy. Okay. My husband is going to intercept. There are also sort of more easy drop in, drop off cooking schools. For example, in the Central Market in Florence, there's a cooking school that's on the top level. You have to have a reservation and know when the class schedule is. But if you have a casual interest and you want to do, like, a day of cooking, you want to learn how to make some pasta or some regional dish, you can do something like that, or you can go a little bit deeper. I usually like to send people who are interested in cooking to a woman I know named Judy Francini, who is also an American but has lived in Tuscany since the 80s. She used to run a cooking school inside the Central Market, which she closed, but she still is just able to connect people with all sorts of chefs around Tuscany and to do things either out in the countryside or in Florence

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or to do market tours. And because she is a cooking teacher, she can really meet you at your level. So if cooking is of a big interest, then finding somebody local who really knows what they're doing, and it's not just sort of like a rote activity is definitely worthwhile.

Laura

Okay.

Danielle

The harvest season, of course, in Tuscany is fantastic. I feel like when you go anywhere, you take a cooking class - if you want to make pizza, take that class in Naples, if you want to do pasta, Bologna is probably the best place to do it. So sort of think about the kind of food that you like, and you can integrate that- the best place for you to do that where you end up during your trip. Is there something in particular in mind that you have?

Laura

No, we just are open to that type of experience. We love to cook, and we love to try new foods, and we like to have people in, cook together and stuff like that. So I think almost anything really, would be...

Danielle

In Tuscany, it's great to do - it's a little more meat heavy in Tuscany, steak things.

Laura

He loves meat, that's his thing.

Danielle

So then you also want to go to Panzano, and this is a very well known place, but it is indeed wonderful, even though it is very famous. Panzano is a place where the famous Tuscan butcher Dario Ceccini is based, and he's been on lots of different travel shows. He's been on Anthony Bourdain and Somebody Feed Phil. He's definitely well known, but he is this Tuscan butcher who reads Dante or recites Dante aloud while he works and has some very specific methods and techniques and philosophies. But you can go to his restaurant, and this would be like a meal to make a reservation now. And this is like a meal to spend some money on, eating in Panzano, if you can get a reservation. If you can't get a reservation, which is very possible because it's well known, he has a couple of food trucks that are open on certain days of the week. I think, like, on the weekends, generally, his food trucks are open, so you could still go to Panzano and eat at one of the trucks.

Laura

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And where is that?

Danielle

It's also in Tuscany. It's between Florence and (south of Florence).

Laura

Okay.

Danielle

We sort of describe Tuscany? Usually, if we weren't recording this, I pull up Google Maps. We would do a screen share together because it's kind of an orbit. Most stuff is south of Florence in general, but yeah, it's between Florence and Montepulciano. It's a small town, and he's really the person that put it on the map. Okay. It wasn't a place that was famous before that.

Danielle

Tuscany - olive oil, of course, is such a huge product in Tuscany, so I would consider an olive oil tasting. That's the other thing I forgot to mention. In San Miniato, I was telling you about the Beconcini family. Also, there is very close to their property, a place called truffleintuscany.com, among some of the rare Italians that are good at a website. It breaks my heart. There's so many amazing providers and hosts and resources in Italy and so many bad websites.

Laura

I've seen a few bad ones.

Danielle

Oh, my gosh. Yeah. Like so many people, it's like you just really cannot judge a company by its website. You can't judge a book by its cover when it comes to Italy. In fact, sometimes a bad website is indicative of a very good experience. I always say this about Naples. This has changed in more recent years. But don't look (all over Italy really) don't look for the place that has the red checkered tablecloth, look for the place that has one light bulb hanging on a wire. That's often the best place. But Truffle in Tuscany is a family that has been hunting truffles, and they usually don't go to Tuscany for truffles. That's more in Umbria or in Piedmonte, but in San Miniato. There are black truffles, and they have these wonderful dogs. And I love dogs, as evidenced by my dog, with he squeaky toy. And you go out, you get into this guy's, Fiat Panda. I mean, it's like, don't wear anything nice that day, you're covered in dirt. He picks out one of the dogs for the day, and you just go out in the woods and you go searching for truffles. You may or may not find something, and then at the end, you go back to their property, and his sister cooks you lunch, and you just hang out and enjoy life. It's wonderful.

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Laura

That sounds great.

Danielle

It's an authentic experience. Like, some of those things can be a little contrived.

Laura

Right. But it's hard to know the difference between which one is going to be like that and which one isn't.

Danielle

It's very hard. Yeah. And I think that's to circle back to what we were saying before about overwhelming information. And there are so many places in Italy that look so picturesque and that gets so much attention on Instagram and TikTok and yeah, it's not a false picture, but it's not always the best experience. Sometimes the places how a place feels is more important than how it looks. Kind of like sometimes you see a supermodel in real life, they look sort of strange because they're so tall and they're so angular. The same thing can be for some of these towns. Like, some of these places that look so dramatic and beautiful are actually very difficult to navigate or very hard to move around. Whereas some of these smaller towns, which maybe don't look as spectacular in a photograph, are really full of wonderful people and a lot of souls.

Laura

Right.

Danielle

So what else is on your wish list?

Laura

What would be a coastal area that would be close?

Danielle

There's a beach down there called Talamone. It's really going to the beach. Italians don't go in the water after the summer.

Laura

Not to go and lay on the beach, but just to be on the coast.

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Danielle

Okay. Yeah, because sometimes if you're looking...

Ed

You know like the coast highway in California, you've got a really nice drive. You've got the ocean there, you've got the cliffs, right?

Laura

Yeah.

Danielle

There is the coast in Tuscany. Viareggio is like the easiest, sort of like closest to Florence. Talamone is beautiful, but a lot of these places are kind of resort towns and they can be a little desolate in the off season. Two ideas for you. One is the island of Elba, which is on the Tyrrhenian side, and Napoleon was exiled there for a while and he escaped. So that's kind of the most/the biggest claim to fame of Elba. It's beautiful. You get there by taking a ferry from the town of Piombino, spelled P-I-O-M-B-I-N-O. Piombino is like an industrial port. I think there's a nice part of Piombino. I haven't seen it, but I remember the first time I went there, I saw this giant I don't know what it was, like an oil refinery. I was like, Where am I going? And I don't want to swim in this water. But pretty soon you arrive in a really beautiful paradise, and that's a wonderful place and will be very affordable in October. So you could probably get an apartment right on the beach, Airbnb, that kind of thing, in Elba.

Laura

That wouldn't just be like a day trip thing. You would think maybe it would be better to just go and stay for a day or two.

Danielle

I would stay there for a few days. You could do it as a day trip, depending on where you were based, like, if you were based closer to that area. But if you want to make this one of the couple of places that you stay for three to four days, Elba would be a fantastic. Choice.

Laura

Okay.

Danielle

And then the other idea I have is the far less travels with truly spectacular Abruzzo, which is southeast of Tuscany. And Abruzzo is a place where - Tuscany can be very expensive. People

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should need to be going to Abruzzo where the food is unbelievably good and people are really nice, and there's mountains and coasts, and the coastline of Abruzzo is really beautiful. There are these things called Trabocchi, which are like these fishing huts that jut out into the sea, and you can go have lunch of fresh fish right on one of these huts. It's a region that's kind of wild. I thought of it when you were sort of describing that, the Pacific Coast Highway of California. It's definitely sort of wild and rugged. The driving will be a little more challenging there in the mountains, less so on the coast. This is a place - Katy and I also know whenever you're traveling, Italy, frankly, no matter where you are, have a paper map in the glove box. There are places GPS just goes on a coffee break. And the other thing the GPS always does, it drives me nuts, is sometimes to save you five minutes, they'll have you get off the highway to go through a tiny village. They don't tell you that the streets of the village are 3ft wide. So just always scan your route ahead of time and say, you know what, we'll stay on the highway, and we're fine spending that extra ten minutes on the road.

Laura

Okay.

Danielle

Certainly if you go to Abruzzo, that advice applies double, but it's definitely very rewarding. I know a family that's there right now. I think they thought they were going to Tuscany originally. They had some family in Europe who sort of put it all together, and they're in Abruzzo, and they're just posting pictures every day. Like, "we had no idea, we didn't even know what this place was beforehand, but it is paradise". It needs to be on far more many people's radar. And one of my soapboxes is, especially if you're a budget traveler, there's so many beautiful places in Italy. You got to stop going to the big cities. You got to stop going to Cinque Terre, Amalfi coast. You've got to explore all these wonderful other places in Italy.

Laura

I put Cinque Terre on my do not go list because I kept seeing all these people saying, this is horrible. It's like Disneyland. There's so many people here.

Danielle

It's a beautiful place, no doubt. But I just feel like it's too crowded right now. That's just the simple answer. There's just too many people there. What were some of the other places you had on your list?

Laura

Okay, Montepulciano. I had that on my list and then a whole bunch of ones that I can't pronounce. P-E-R-U-G-I-A.

Danielle

Perugia. Perugia is a beautiful city. Yeah. Perugia is in the region of Umbria, and it is university town. It's a cool college town.

Laura

Okay.

Danielle

Really beautiful. Do you want better wineries to recommend?

Ed

Absolutely.

Danielle

You want me to bring in the wine guy for some wineries? For sure. Another person. This is my husband, Christian Galiani.

Danielle

Christian.

Laura

Hello. Thanks for joining.

Christian

My pleasure. Always happy to consult.

Laura

Yeah.

Christian

So if you're looking for a new experience as far as wine goes, Danielle mentioned Pietro Beconcini, but depending upon how sort of user friendly of an experience you want versus how rustic you want, is going to dictate ways which wineries are best for your trip. So I'll give you an example. If you're really into the wine, right. The very best of the Montepulciano in Abruzzo is going to be, without a doubt, Emidio Pepe.

Laura

Oh, yeah.

Danielle

You should go to Emidio Pepe.

Christian

So Emidio Pepe. Very tiptop of Abruzzo wine. That's like their first growth. That's like think like the Lafite Rothschild of Abruzzo, and that's them, and it's still rustic enough where the old man still putters around and the daughter really runs things now. But the wine is spectacular, and it's not inexpensive, right? You're going to pay somewhere around 50 euro for the tasting, but it is without a doubt the best wine you'll have in the region.

Danielle

If you were gonna buy one of those bottle here it would be really expensive.

Christian

Oh forget it yeah. Relative to what you're going to pay. And that's sort of my claim to fame, is finding stuff that's kind of that hidden gem. I'm cheap. Truth be told. It pains me to pay \$50 for a bottle of wine when I know I can spend \$10 for something that I know is just as good, just doesn't have as fancy of a pedigree. But I have to say, Emidio Pepe is the best winery within driving distance that you're going to experience for the money. And they'll take you through the vineyard depending upon how much detail you want to know about it, etc. And either way, it's always a great time. It's a trip of a lifetime there.

Danielle

Yeah, that would be a really special place. Obviously, there's great wine all over Tuscany, but that would be like, a really special destination. And I believe they have rooms that you can stay there.

Christian

They do. Yeah, they do in fact.

Ed

That would be good because we wouldn't have to drive after the tasting.

Danielle

Exactly.

Christian

Good thinking. So there's that. And if you're going to be in Umbria, you can say the same thing about Paolo Bea. Paolo Bea's winery is sort of just spectacular, but if you don't feel like spending Paolo Bea money, they have lots of different other vineyards just right around Perugia, which we'll include in the email, which I think are spectacular.

Danielle

I'm writing this down so I can send you this information here because I actually don't know how to spell Bea.

Christian

B-E-A.

Danielle

Okay, that's it. All right. Easy enough.

Christian

In Tuscany you're going to have lots of - that's sort of the epicenter for wine tourism in Italy, so you're going to have lots of tourist traps. So the best thing to remember is either if you want to have the sort of Napa experience, go to Banfi. Banfi is started by an Italian American family from Long Island, ironically, they went and they opened up a vineyard in Tuscany and they have just a fantastic sort of user experience when you get there.

Danielle

Yeah. That's super well organized for tourism. And it's a beautiful place. And they have events. Yeah. That's like if you don't want to think at all, go to Banfi.

Christian

Exactly.

Danielle

If you want to really hang out with somebody's one eye cat and get to know their family and get drunk and eat some of the best cheese, we had such good cheese there.

Christian

It was spectacular.

Danielle

We had this amazing pecorino. Then you go to Beconcini and then you'll be hanging out in the room where they dry the grapes for the Vin Santo. So you should do both, actually.

Christian

You should try both. You should take the Pepsi Challenge, so to speak, and see which experience you like better.

Laura

Okay.

Christian

Beconcini is fantastic because it's offbeat, but they are up for the Tre Bicchieri, which is the wine of Italy for their wine. So this is a serious winery. It's a wolf and sheep clothing.

Danielle

So we don't mean to - just start to create information overwhelmed for you once again, I'm going to put all these things together. It will all make sense. And when you look at it also on the map, then you can strategize as to exactly where you want to be. But I think the overall idea here, which I try to do with any itinerary whether it's my own or for somebody else, is like to balance out those cool local rustic mom and pop places with some really nice experiences because you're on vacation, so you should have some nights where you dress up and do something really special.

Laura

We are up for a special dinner. I would want to spring for the winery that you recommended.

Christian

Emidio Pepe.

Laura

But then also, they don't all have to be epic. We like wine, but we're certainly not connoisseurs. We're not necessarily in it to have the most amazing wine I ever tasted, but that would be a plus.

Danielle

But also, not only is this just about enjoyment, but you get to learn something and take it home with you. I'm always such an advocate, too - a lot of times people, they're overwhelmed

and they go, well, what are the best things? And the best things are going to be things that you can dig into and that can become interests long after your trip is over. Just find something that has a kernel of an interest or maybe a slight fascination. Anything that has the potential to become a fascination. Go to Italy and experience it where you will find the masters. And then you come home with a new insight, a new experience and something else to pursue that will hopefully make your life richer.

Laura

Hopefully this won't be our only trip.

Ed

I want to see it, but I don't want to spend a lot of time driving everywhere to see things, because when we went to Ireland, it was like, oh, we're going to see the whole country when we got there. And they were like, do you want to see the whole country or do you want to see the people? And it was like, yeah, we need to spend two or three days and maybe a half day going to another city and then be able to establish again.

Danielle

Right.

Laura

We had more fun in places we stayed more than one day, so we did learn, that for sure.

Danielle

Well I think with this, you can do, you have a decent amount of time. I would maybe pick, like, three locations where you spend three or four nights.

Laura

Right.

Danielle

Something coastal. Elba or the coast of Abruzzo, someplace right. In central Tuscany. You might want to stay in the city for a night or two. If there are one or two museums you want to do or you want to go do any sort of city activities, any shopping, that sort of thing. Yeah. When I put this all together for you, I think then you'll probably make your decision.

Laura

I thought if we flew into Florence, that maybe we would stay there for a night or two, just to sort of get your bearings and catch up on our sleep or whatever before we headed out.

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Danielle

Yeah. Florence is a jewel. It's an absolute treasure.

Laura

It looks way cheaper than we might be doing in Rome. I don't know. We haven't looked at prices on tickets yet.

Danielle

Good. Any other questions, challenges? Anything else you want to talk about that is weighing on you as you plan this trip?

Laura

No, I've just been deep diving into the you know, don't check a bag and all that stuff. What to take?

Danielle

Yeah. This summer in particular has been challenging mostly for people that are doing transfers. If you're able to do a direct flight from the United States, so, say, for example, you fly from Knoxville to New York and then you go direct.

Laura

Right.

Danielle

Then you don't need to carry just to carry on only. People that are transferring it, like Charles de Gaulle or Frankfurt, are having trouble with lost luggage. However, I think that this summer has been just an overwhelming amount of tourism. So little for two years and then so much in Europe is having all the same problems we are having with staffing and inflation, fuel prices. So I think if you've got to take an extra bag, take an extra bag, don't worry about that.

Laura

I would love to be one of those people that could just go with the carry on.

Danielle

Yeah. I always keep a change of clothes, a toothbrush, some clean underwear in your carry on so that if your flight is delayed, you have something. But Italy's got great shopping. If you

have to go buy new outfits, it's not the worst thing in the world. It's not the worst thing in the world.

Laura

Lost my luggage.

Danielle

Yeah. Obviously important things. Medication, eyeglasses, all that stuff, put that in your carry on always, no matter what. But I don't think you should. I know a lot of people have said that. They're like, I'm so terrorized by people on message boards that say I can only bring a carry on. I'm like, do what you need to do, don't worry about that. And the same goes for money belts. Certainly there's been a lot of pickpocket - there's always a lot of pickpocketing in the big touristy destinations. But carry yourself as you would in any major city in the world. Italy is not a dangerous country overall, so just use caution. And I don't think

Christian

It's common sense

Danielle

I don't think it warrants at a really heightened level. And I know for somebody that's been pickpocketed, they'll get very upset when I say that. And I understand it's a terrible feeling of being violated, but I don't know, we're New Yorkers, so I guess we just have a normal sense of vigilance around our bags.

Christian

It's just common sense. Right? I mean, if you're in a crowded people, chances are something is going to happen to someone somewhere.

Laura

But we're not particularly afraid of that sort of thing. I think we're aware enough. Where did you guys go together as a couple? That was probably, would you say, the best or the most meaningful or memorable place that you've been together in Italy?

Christian

Wow. That's a tough one.

Laura

We go a lot so.

Christian

Every time we go...

Laura

Something must come to mind.

Christian

Well, it depends. Danielle lived in Florence for a year. So when I was able to see it with her for the first time as an adult and walk around the last time I'd been to Florence was prior to last year, was when I was twelve years old and we did the, as we affectionately referred to it in my family. The Florentine Death March with my father. Rest in peace. Who dragged us around Florence.

Laura

Don't want to do that

Christian

No air conditioning and we finally stopped for dinner at the last pizzeria that was open at 10:00. I had negative feelings about Florence prior to that. So when I was able to see it as an adult, with the mind of an adult

Danielle

And I lived there, so I do it extremely well, so was able to just move around.

Christian

That was sort of a perspective changer for me because being in the food and wine world, I got to have one of the best meals of my life at Sostanza, I was able to do a deep dive into Tuscan Wine and pay Tuscan prices as opposed to paying American prices. And I was able to see the city where if you drop Leonardo today, he could find his way home. That was especially meaningful to me.

Laura

Right.

Danielle

And then, I don't know, I mean, our tours are in the south of Italy. I feel like every time we go to Naples, even though we've been there many times, we just always like, we're like "life, it's so rich. Why do we worry about anything. Life is beautiful."

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Christian

There was a time that I cried when I had the pizza in Pompeii.

Laura

I want to cry over pizza.

Danielle

You gotta to go south for that. Your next trip, you'll go south and we'll tell you where you can cry over pizza.

Ed

I'm seeing what looks like a lake just straight south of Arezzo and it's kind of like tucked in the mountains, it looks like.

Danielle

Let me have a look. Let me see if I can pull up Google Maps quickly.

Katy

is it Lake Trasimeno?

Danielle

Okay. Yeah. That's most famous for Hannibal, the military General Hannibal in ancient Rome trekking a bunch of elephants across Lake Trasimeno and apparently they're drowned there. That's not why you'd be going to see. Yeah. It is also a beautiful area, and there are places along the lake where you can stay and for sure, off the beaten path.

Danielle

Katy, do you have any advice for Trasimeno?

Katy

No no, we didn't stop there. I've been in the area recently. We didn't stop there because we were on a hot date. We had a hot date with Deborah in Arezzo, but we didn't stop there. And actually, some friends of ours that live in Gubbio that have been on the podcast, Sal and Sarah up in the hills in Umbria, they sort of were like - because we were thinking of going in and they said, "no, go to Gubbio. You'll love that more." And we did love Gubbio. Actually, Gubbio is a really lovely town in Umbria that probably reach from the Arezzo area quite

easily. It's maybe a little bit of a longer day trip, but it's a beautiful medieval town, and I can compare it to maybe San Gimignano, but no crowds.

Danielle

Exactly. In fact, if you want to go to San Gimignano, which you don't want, crowds go to Gubbio, that's excellent advice. And I would also recommend the city of Urbino, which is not far.

Laura

These are all drivable from, say, Arezzo, right?

Danielle

Yeah. In fact, I remember when I was in graduate school, we did a day trip where we went from Arezzo to Gubbio to Urbino, all in one afternoon. We were ambitious, but we did it.

Katy

In Gubbio you can get these really cute - well I'm actually really terrified of heights, so this was actually terrifying for me. But it's like little bird cages that go up to the top of the mountain, and up there you can go to a church and you can see the mummified remains of Sant'Ubaldo. But unfortunately for my family, I'm really terrified of heights. Okay, so this bird cage, lovely birdcage chairlift thing, I refused to go back down in it, so I basically walked down the mountain. So I think my family is going to have a similar experience with Gubbio as you did with Florence, Christian.

Danielle

That's going to be their memory. They're going to be on a podcast talking about it in 30 years.

Katy

Exactly.

Danielle

Gubbio is beautiful. And all of these hill towns, too, if they're so rich in medieval history, it feels very Assassin's Creed, very Game of Thrones. Definitely in medieval history. You might want to read some Ken Follett books before you go on this trip, because the medieval history is really interesting, and some of these villages, I mean, it really feels like time is still. Gubbio is one of those - just surrounded by stone walls and so ancient, and yet modern life is still going on inside of it.

Laura

Right. Sounds perfect.

Danielle

Yeah. All right, Katy, you have anything else?

Katy

Oh, no. I just thought it was so wonderful just having as you know, I've just spent two weeks in Umbria and Tuscany myself, and there's so many new things to discover. I just want to go back to Tuscany again. Thanks, Danielle. Luckily, I'm not going to be - well don't have too long to wait. But, yeah, one thing I really want to stress to everyone that's listening is that you can't find so many places on the internet, and Danielle mentioned this before, but they're terrible at marketing the Italian. So if you really want to find places that are different or unique or really special, then you really need to tap into someone like Danielle, because you won't find it otherwise. I mean, it's kind of one of my pet peeves when people say, just Google it because you can't. The pages that are ranking high on Google are actually people that know how to rank on Google. And being quite good at that myself, I know that it's an actual skill, so it doesn't necessarily mean that the activity is great or the advice is great. It just means they know how to write to rank on Google. So please, everyone, make sure you tap into amazing advice like Danielle so that you can find all these wonderful, wonderful places.

Katy

Okay. Thank you, Laura and Ed, for joining us live and sharing your travel plans. And thank you, Danielle and Christian, for your amazing insight. And Danielle, if listeners would like to tap into your knowledge, how can they organize a trip planning session with you?

Danielle

Just go to feastravel.com and you can click on the tab that says trip consultation. And then I've got a few different options. I've got stuff for people that are just thinking about a trip, especially thinking ahead to 2023. And given how crowded it's been this year, definitely start thinking about 2023 now. I have another service for people who have their itineraries well planned, and they just want somebody who's actually going to tell them the exact tour guides, the exact restaurants they should eat. And then we also have services for people who don't want to do anything. And we'll do everything for you. So they're on the website.

Katy

Oh, Grazie. Thank you, Danielle. Thank you to Laura and Ed and all our listeners and watches for joining us today. I hope you're now inspired to travel a little deeper into Tuscany, Umbria, and Abruzzo and discover all its hidden and untold corners. Ciao for now, everyone. See you next time.

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Katy

Well Danielle's done it again. Everytime I talk to her I get so many new ideas and ones that are truly targeted to my interests as well as our guests - food and wine of course, with a little adventure on the side. We've just been in Tuscany for a week and now I'm trying to work out how we can do another! I just love it.

If you'd like your very own trip consultation with Danielle you can visit her website feasttravel.com where you'll find details of the services she offers. Of course we'll put all this information into our detailed show notes for you at untolditaly.com/137.

Thanks for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. We truly appreciate all of you, especially our Amici private podcast members, and of course all our subscribers and listeners joining us from around the world. If you have a spare moment we would so appreciate it if you left us a 5 star rating and review on your favorite podcast app. That way we can reach more Italy-loving travelers just like you.

That's all for today, next week I'm going to talk a little bit about our recent family trip to Italy. You'll meet my children and hear what they liked most about our trip (and what they didn't!) but until then it's ... "ciao for now".