

Untold Italy Episode 140 - 7 Reasons to plan an October trip to Italy

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 140.

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! Welcome to all our listeners - those who have been with us for a long time (you know who you are!), especially our podcast Amici (special friends and supporters of the podcast), and of course those of you who are starting your journey with us and joining in on all the fun of exploring Italy - from its majestic and iconic cities to its lesser known regions. I'm so happy that you're all here with us and can't wait to share all the magic, people, and places of this incredible country with you.

I'm recording this episode for you today in the month of September but it's all about October and I'll tell you why. September is a very busy month in Italy for visitors, perhaps the busiest - especially to everyone's favorite destinations - Rome, Florence, Venice, Tuscany, Amalfi Coast, and Cinque Terre.

I think that's because the travel industry has done a great job of convincing people that August is too hot and crowded with European tourists, so English-speaking visitors like ourselves might prefer the cooler climes of September.

But what's happened, especially since covid, is that September - and particularly the first 2 weeks is now extremely busy - probably busier than June which was record-breaking in terms of visitor numbers this year. We're hearing this from our partners, tour guides, accommodation providers, and more.

And what does that mean for us travelers? Prices and crowds go up and experiences and attractions are fully booked. Personally, I find that all a bit exhausting so today I'm going to tell you all about why I love visiting Italy in October and some of the great places to go if you do plan a trip then.

I've always loved October wherever I've lived in the world. Apart from the fact that it's my birthday month (and I love celebrating my birthday), it's also a time when either Spring is in

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full bloom where I live in Australia or the leaves are turning and days are cooler and a little shorter in the northern hemisphere. In October you really feel like you are in the middle of autumn or fall and that's my favorite season of all.

But why should you visit Italy then?

Katy

Well, I have a few reasons for you, seven, in fact, and I'm going to take you through those. And then I'm going to talk to you about some of the beautiful places that you can visit in Italy that will just charm you beyond all imagination. So let's go through it now. So the first reason why I love October as a month to visit Italy is fewer crowds. Not everyone is bothered by crowds, but I prefer to have a more leisurely approach to my travel. And so in October, this is when everything is a lot more enjoyable in the cities especially. You can walk leisurely down the streets and just soak up the atmosphere among the locals because if you've ever lived in a big city where it's a big tourist population, then you'll know that the locals kind of scurry away in the peak seasons and try and stay out of the way of visitors, unfortunately. Because it just can be quite exhausting to push through thousands of visitors who don't really know what direction they want to go in. So in October in Rome, for example, you can walk down the street and just meander. Same in Florence, which you can't really do in September. And we were in Florence in September 2017 and it was so busy, it was crazy busy and you can always find ways away from the crowds for sure, but in this case I just prefer not to, frankly. And it's also if you want to go to a restaurant or something that's really iconic and we all know my favorite restaurant in Rome is Roscioli. It's almost impossible to get in September. I know because I've tried and I left my run too late. So that's another reason why you really need to have a think about the timing of your trip if you are not keen on crowds. And October is a really great time to avoid as many people as possible and also have some decent weather. You can also have a lot more flexibility when there's fewer crowds because it means you can pick and choose some of the activities and move some things around in your itinerary that you probably can't do in peak season. Like I mentioned, sometimes you just have to book in at a restaurant that you want to go to and just take the time that you're given when it's peak season but you might be able to get in at the last minute in October. So that's my first reason why Italy is a great time to visit in October.

Katy

And my second reason is all about your budget. So in October you have much better value and choice for everything from flights and hotels and tours. So prices this summer in Italy were the highest in Europe thanks to really strong demand and really high occupancy rates in the hotels. So what it meant was that the hotels were able to adjust their prices because they had so much demand, especially coming from the United States. And similarly, with airlines, there wasn't as many flights as they were perhaps previously and so there was a big rush for everyone to go to Italy, hence the prices went up. Just simple demand and supply equation. So delaying your trip, if you can, till October, you'll get much better deals and if you want to stretch your budget a little bit further, you can maybe grab yourself an upgrade in a bigger

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hotel room or one with a spectacular view. And so who doesn't like an upgrade? I know I do. So it's another thing to consider. I understand why people really want to go when it's sunny and bright. We're going to talk about weather a little bit later, but I think you'll find that it's not as gloomy as you might think. So yeah, as I mentioned, there's better flight availability for October. Usually you'll get last minute deals and also there's tour availability. So if you're wanting to go and see the Vatican at this particular time, it's much easier to do that when the crowds are fewer.

Katy

Okay, my next point is going to be about the weather. Now, obviously in October things start to cool down a little bit, which, if you've heard my commentary about what Rome was like this summer, it's a sweet relief, to be honest. And personally, I love walking around cities when there's a bit of crisp in the air and you're not getting too sweaty and you can just pick up a good pace and walk around and soak it all up. And so October I found really great for exploring, and that's in the cities like Rome, Florence and Venice, but it's also great for exploring those areas where it's traditionally quite warm in the south, like Sicily and Puglia and also the big sites which are quite exposed to open air like the Colosseum and Appian Way in Rome. It's just much more pleasant to be exploring when the temperatures around in the 20s, which I think is in Fahrenheit, is around the 50s or 60s. Personally, I think it's much more pleasant. But you can also get lucky and get some warm days for swimming when you're on the coast, on the Amalfi coast and maybe in Sicily. So it's got a nice mixed bag in October, and I think especially when you get towards the end of the month, it becomes great pasta eating weather. I mean, who doesn't love a steaming bowl of pasta with a glass of red wine when there's a cool night and you're cozy in your restaurant? It's just perfection to me.

Katy

Okay, so reason number four, why I think October is a wonderful time to visit Italy is that it is harvest season and it's a very, very special time of year. We talked about what happens in Tuscany last year with Arianna from KM Zero Tours, I think it was on episode number 89 if you want to go back and have a listen about that. But it's such a special time of year because this is when the harvest of the grapes and olives takes place and of course, these ingredients are so iconic in Italian cuisine and the lifestyle and the culture. So it's part of the rhythm of life, it's part of the countryside traditions, and if you can be part of that or watch it or even just observe it for a little while. It's really soothing, I think, because they've been carrying out these processes for centuries and there's something really comforting about repetition of seasonal processes. I find it really soothing myself, just to know the people who have been taking these steps every single year, year after year, and that even though the pace of change in life has gone really fast and we've had lots of disruptions lately, we've still got this rhythm of life going on. And what happens in the countryside is, obviously, once you've harvested the grapes in particular, then the countryside looks completely different and so it looks a little bit bare and raw, but I just love that look as well, because it's just such a contrast between the beautiful green rolling hills that existed before. So in Tuscany, for example, it all becomes

quite sandy colored and you've got the vine leaves sort of dripping off and it's just a really beautiful, not desolate, but just a really quiet atmosphere, I feel. I find it really, really soothing. So the grape harvest is known as vendemmia, and that would happen throughout September and October and maybe even this year it happened a little bit earlier because it's been so hot. But if you can be around in that time, there is a lot of festivals and celebrations when the harvest is finished and you want to see if you can maybe hook into one of those. And it's just worthwhile searching up, especially if you're going to be in Tuscany or Piemonte or some of the big wine regions. What's happening for the great harvest? Make sure you do book if you're wanting to go to wineries, though, because obviously they're very busy and we've actually had to adjust a few plans for some of the things that we've got coming up, just because, yes, everyone's busy for vendemmia or the grape harvest. The olive harvest as well - it's really special. People have olive groves, little small plots, and then they can come to communal areas and press their own olives to get the olive oil that they will use for the coming year. Like I said, this process has been going on for centuries and it's a very community orientated activity and it's really nice. And if you've ever tasted freshly pressed olive oil, it's something that's quite unique and quite delicious because as soon as it gets into the bottle, it's starting to lose a lot of the nutrients and the taste that comes from that very freshly pressed olive - amazing.

Katy

And what also happens at this time of year, and this is my fifth point, is the seasonal produce. If you've listen to these podcasts for a while, you know that we're really passionate about the seasonal changes in Italy and the way that the food culture is focused on the ingredients that are available at the time of year. So we're not bringing strawberries into winter because they simply don't grow in winter. We don't take chestnuts in summer because they're usually not available in summer, but they are starting to become available in October. And there's nothing quite like the smell of chestnuts roasting over the coals. And when you're walking around a little town or even in Piazza Navona in Rome, they have chestnut roasting people that will sell you a bag of roasted chestnuts that you can munch on. And I just love this tradition and you can mark the time of year just by what's appearing on your plate and in the streets. So, for example, we were in Orvieto in late October and we just hopped off the train and we walked up to the hill and we're starting to walk through this town and just at the city gates, just at the cobbled streets, there's a guy selling chestnuts and it's just that fragrant smell and you just know that you're in Italy and it's October. It's a beautiful, beautiful feeling. The other ingredients that are available at this time of year, which are really delicious, and some of my favorite, favorite ingredients in the world is porcini mushrooms, and also kind of related to mushrooms, but not really, is truffles. And it's big truffle season in autumn or fall, and especially in October when you'll find in Piemonte in the city of Alba, they have the iconic and extremely popular Alba White Truffle Festival, which is really important food festival in Italy. So what you find in the restaurants all over Italy is these ingredients are celebrated and used and special dishes are created. So it's the right time to try porcini mushrooms and truffles in risotto, over pasta and just enjoy the delicious taste of something that's so fresh and straight out of the ground or off the tree. And it's not something that you can repeat at

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another season because you're not going to get the same taste. Just like the olive oil, which is amazing when it's freshly pressed, you can get an incredible taste from truffles that are straight out of the ground.

Katy

The 6th reason that I wanted to say that October is a brilliant time to visit Italy is that October is when Italians celebrate many of their *sagre* or food festivals. And of course, this is tied to the seasonal produce that's coming out of the ground or from the earth. And there are some of my favorite things to experience in Italy and I won't stop talking about them. I'm very sorry if you're getting bored of it, but I won't. But if you've been listening for a while, because they are just incredible community events and they're not put on for tourists, they're put on by the locals to celebrate the harvest of their particular local products and the things that they're very proud of, including their local dishes. So I briefly mentioned the White Truffle Fair in Piemonte or Piedmont, and that takes place in the town of Alba. And people come from all over the world to taste and buy these white truffles. It's just one of those iconic food festivals that if you're a dedicated foodie, you will know about and you'll have it on your wish list of places to go. And so what happens in the town of Alba is that the streets align with little stalls and people display on these beautiful displays on sort of like blue colored plaid material. They're special truffles and they have them under cloches and it's just really amazing atmosphere. So from all around the world, restauranters will send buyers to buy truffles and they'll be flown from New York to Tokyo and all the way around. But the thing about truffles, like we said about the olive oil, is best if it comes straight from the ground and they don't travel so well. So if you want to try white truffle, then you're going to have to do it in Piedmont and the best place to do it is at the Alba truffle fair. The White truffle fair in Alba in October.

Katy

The other *sagre* that I wanted to mention is *Sagra della Castagna*, and that's on the Amalfi Coast in a little town called Scala. And this is where, again, they celebrate the chestnut and everything amazing about the chestnut and their local dishes. And you don't really think of chestnuts on the Amalfi Coast, but in fact, the area of Campania is very famous for chestnuts, and there's many, many chestnut groves in that area. And they have some very delicious dishes, including pasta dishes that they create on these occasions. And that's a very special time of year down on the Amalfi Coast in October.

Katy

In the Food Bowl of Italy, in Emilia Romagna, where we met our beautiful friend Giulia, who's been on the podcast many times, there is a very special event in October, the very start of October, which is called *Mast Cot*. And this is a *sagre* that celebrates the boiling of the grape must. And this is the start of the process to make the aged balsamic vinegar of modern. And it's a really important part of the process. So when we were there recently, we actually got to taste that grape must juice and it was really delicious, actually. And it was actually that taste

that made my son really interested in the process of making balsamic vinegar because it's a really old and I guess, very precise process. And so it's this celebration in October called Mast Cot in the town of Spilambero, which is where Guilia lives. That is the celebration of the start of that process that will go on for a minimum of twelve years, which is, to my mind, pretty amazing that anyone has the dedication to stick it out for twelve years to see the end result of something that in fact is so very delicious.

Katy

The last sagre that I wanted to mention - it's is not really a sagre, it's more of a festival, but it's one of the most famous ones in Europe, and it's called Euro Chocolate, and it's a chocolate festival that takes place in Perugia in Umbria. So again, it's just a whole week dedicated to chocolate. And so you can go around tasting chocolate and trying all the different dark chocolate, milk chocolate and just really artisan-level chocolate that people that have spent a lot of time perfecting their craft. And it's a wonderful experience to have in beautiful Umbria, which is one of the areas that I really think people should seek out a lot more. And Perugia is actually not difficult to reach from Rome, and you can reach by train. And it's one of those places that you're going to fall in love with because it's got a beautiful piazza, little local markets, and just a lovely medieval feel. I really liked it a lot and I really encourage anyone to go there, especially in October.

Katy

Okay, the last reason that I wanted to mention about why Italy is a great time to visit in October is well, it's not really related to Italy, but I think it's more around how maybe your business works or who you're working for, your employer. But depending on your industry, you might find it easier to book leave at this time. And I know as a business owner and former manager, that managing the rush for leave over summer is always a challenge and October is generally light for leave-taking. So it might be a good idea to get your vacation time approved then. And you can take advantage of all these amazing reasons why October is such a great time to visit. So you've got the cheaper prices, the better value, the seasonal food, food festivals, cooler temperatures, and just the general harvest atmosphere.

Katy

And I just want to mention that up and down the country, the landscape is changing as well. So if you're someone that likes beautiful autumn or fall landscapes with changing leaves and all of that, this is what I love. And yeah, you can definitely get that to some stunning things, especially on the lakes - they're covered in trees that change color, and it's just quite vibrant and exciting. And if that's the type of thing that you love, then you should hot foot it over to Italy in October. So now I've given you the reasons why you should visit Italy in October.

Katy

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How about some of the favorite places that maybe you might like to try in October? Now, of course, the big cities are very popular because at this time of year, as it's getting cooler, there's a great time to visit museums and galleries. And so if you're a cultural person that loves soaking up all the art and the history and culture, then yes, definitely head to the big cities because it'll be much less busy and you'll be able to enjoy the art pieces in relative peace and quiet. However, once again, this is the Untold Italy Travel Podcast, and we like teaching you about and telling you about some of our favorite places that are outside the obvious. And so here are some of the favorite places outside of the big tourist destinations that I'd love to tell you about that you can really have an amazing sense of the country when you visit in autumn.

Katy

So the first place I want to tell you about is Piemonte or Piedmont, and this is a northern region close to France, next to France and also Switzerland. And it's probably our favorite destination in October, thanks to the beautiful leaves changing on the lakes and the hills, the vendemmia or the grape harvest and the White Truffle Festival in Alba. And we'll be heading to Piemonte in late October with a small group of food and wine loving travelers on one of our small group tours to experience all this amazing region has to offer. And because you can really easily get to Turin, which is the capital of Piemonte, just in 1 hour from Milan, you can step into a whole other world that's different from Lombardy, where Milan is, and you can just immerse yourself in the food and wine culture that they have in Piemontese. And it's just got such an amazing sort of luxurious feel.

Katy

It's got a royal past and it's a beautiful, beautiful region that is really unsung. And anyway, we want to show everyone this beautiful region and we hope that you could make the trip there in October. If you wanted to join us on our group tour, we have a few spots left on this trip and if you wanted to join us, you could reach out to me at ciao@untoldishly.com and I am happy to make a meeting with you and talk through it. You can do it on your own or you can do it as a tour, but definitely seek out Piemonte. It's a beautiful, beautiful region and it comes into its own in October, when all the food and wine delicacies that it's famous for come together. So we're talking Barolo wine, the white truffles over pasta, and it all tastes great together.

Katy

Sicily is another area that is just a wonderful time to visit, in early October in particular. And again, it's cooler there - when it can get very hot down in Sicily. And it's a much more temperate environment to enjoy the scenery and outdoor activities, like visiting the Valley of the Temples, which is an absolutely incredible archaeological site near Agrigento. And it's one of those places that it's quite exposed to the elements. So you want to have a little bit of sunshine, but not too hot in the Agrigento. And it's the same in the towns. I mean, they just come a bit more to life because people aren't going so much for a siesta. So when we visit the

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towns and you go into places like Noto, Ragusa, you can really experience what it's like to live as a local in those areas because at this time, most of the visitors have kind of dissipated and you're just getting that local feel, which is really, really special. I'm actually going to be in Sicily on tour with La Rosa Works Sicily, and this is a joint tour that we've created with Karen La Rosa from La Rosa Works, and I'm going to be there this October. I'm so excited to be there to just explore these beautiful towns and villages that I just love so much. And we're going to be spending ten days there and I can't wait. It's going to be amazing that Sicily tour is all sold out, but if anyone's interested, do let me know because we are organizing our calendar for next year.

Katy

The other place that you might like to consider for October is beautiful Matera in Basilicata. And this city comes into its own in October, when the temperatures are much cooler and much more manageable than in peak summer when it's really hot there. The light is magical - it just bounces off the buildings at that time of year and it's just magical. The buildings are all stone colors, so you just get this really nice glow over the city. And yes, perfect time to visit Matera in October.

Katy

Tuscany is another region that's just worth visiting in October. I mentioned before the changing landscape after Vendemmia, and they're just beautiful changes in how the foliage looks and just it's a different pace. Everything sort of slows down a bit. And I just really love the slower pace of life in Tuscany because summer can be really busy in Tuscany and September in particular, as there are a lot of visitors. But once the harvest has been completed, everyone starts to relax and just enjoy living and catching up with friends. And again, you'll see that local pace of life pick up and just a bit more local atmosphere than you would if you were visiting in some of their summer months.

Katy

Umbria, next door to Tuscany, is another place which is just beautiful in October. Once again, the leaves are changing. You have the Perugia Chocolate Festival, the chestnuts are roasting and the olive oil harvest is happening. Umbria is a region that's really dominated and informed by its connection to the land and so when the harvest is running and people are engaged in the harvest and enjoying the fruits of their labor, that's a really special time of year to visit too.

Katy

So I'm hearing you ask Katy, what about the weather really like, is it going to be really, really wet and rainy and am I going to be miserable walking around with my umbrella? So the answer to that is, well, no one really knows. No one could have predicted the heatwave summer that Italy had this year, but you are probably likely to experience a few more showers

than you would in September. But they generally pass quite quickly. And if you use a weather app like AccuWeather (like I use) you can also plan your day around any showers because it gives you like a rain radar that you can look at. We're quite obsessed with these weather things in Australia, so if you're not familiar with them, I take some time to check out the AccuWeather app and you can get it from Apple or Android and it's a really useful thing because you can actually start planning some of your days around it. Anyway. I like to pop into a museum or cafe or have a long lunch or even a nap if it starts raining. And you know what it's all good in October, so don't worry about the weather. I don't. There's plenty of sunshine and fun to go around and other cozy activities to enjoy if it's a little bit misty.

Katy

So I can't wait to visit Italy again this October and explore Sicily with our group tour. I am so excited to return to possibly my favorite city in the world, Ortygia, and soak up the beautiful atmosphere in the piazza and just enjoy the beautiful Duomo, the market and all of the activities happening in spirit of October.

Katy

We're planning several more small group tour itineraries for October 2023 into Sicily, Puglia, and the other regions I mentioned plus some other very special secret places in Italy so stay tuned on the podcast or let us know if you'd like to be informed of upcoming departures. You can check out our itineraries at tours.untolditaly.com We've made them super detailed so you know exactly what to expect but know that there is plenty of food, wine, cheese, and culture to keep you dreaming of Italy for a long time to come.

And of course, we've put a link to our tours website and all the places and companies mentioned in this episode into the show notes at untolditaly.com/140 for episode 140.

Grazie, thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. We truly appreciate all of you, our listeners joining us from around the world, and are very proud to be in the top 10 travel podcasts in the US, UK, Canada, and Australia! Wowee. Not bad for a little podcast started in a pandemic!

We'd be thrilled if you helped spread the word even further so we can reach more Italy-loving travelers just like you. The best way you can do this is by leaving us a 5-star rating or review on your favorite podcast app or forwarding this episode onto a friend who is planning their very own dream trip to Italy.

I'm wrapping up the show now with the promise we'll be back next week and visiting the incredible city of Matera. Most people zip through on a day trip but in this conversation, you'll learn why a longer stay of 2-3 days is an excellent idea. But until then it's... Ciao for now.

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