

# Untold Italy Episode 146 - Best Food and Wine Gifts to Bring Back from Italy

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 146.

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 everyone. I'm just back from a whirlwind trip to Italy where I visited Rome, Sicily and Florence. I wouldn't recommend this type of trip for anyone on vacation by the way. I was there on business but, of course, even though it was fast-paced, I had an amazing time.

And, when I was in Florence I made a new friend! I do love that about this podcast - so many new friends. Anyway, my new friend's name is Toni Mazzaglia and she runs Taste Florence - a food and wine tour company based in the Renaissance city.

I had the pleasure of joining a Taste Florence tour with Toni and it inspired several ideas for podcast episodes so of course, I had to invite her onto the show.

So today Toni and I are going to be chatting about food gifts - for friends, family, or yourself haha - that you can bring back from your trip to Italy. There are so many amazing Italian food stuffs that you likely can't get at home so it's a good idea to stock up while you're there.

But as it's almost Christmas time, and many of us have already been to Italy we'll give you some ideas of where you can order them online. Otherwise, this episode would be a bit of a tease don't you think?!

Ok, let's get started and meet Toni.

## **Katy**

Benvenuta. Toni. Welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

## **Toni**

Ciao, Katy. Thanks for having me.

**Katy**

Oh, it's so fun to be chatting here online on opposite ends of the world, having just recently been walking the streets of Florence, munching on snacks and sipping wine together.

**Toni**

Yeah, it feels like it was just yesterday. It was about two weeks ago.

**Katy**

It all is a bit of a blur. Anyway, was so much fun. And I loved joining your food tour, but as our audience knows, I am a big fan of food tours and always learn something new and interesting about the places I'm visiting, and it's food culture, despite having spent a lot of time there and I just really enjoyed your tour, I learned so much about Florence and about the food culture. So before we get started chatting about food and wine gifts, can we have a little bit of an introduction about yourself to our guests and let them know your story and how you came to be running these amazing food tours in Florence?

**Toni**

Thank you. Sure. I came to Florence in 2002, but we need to back up five years because I actually came to Italy the first time in 1997, and I was going to study abroad in Spain, and I just had some time off and decided to come to Italy just to make it harder to learn Spanish after. And I actually did not come to Florence, and because I heard that everyone spoke English and I wanted to learn how to speak Italian, so I went to Lucca instead. Have you been?

**Katy**

I love Lucca. Yes. It's such a beautiful city, so charming.

**Toni**

It's great. So I went there and I studied in just a few weeks, just enough to forget my Spanish and get confused. And I had a dream that I had found family. And it's a very long story. I'll make it short. I found family. I went down to Sicily, knocked on some doors, went to the town hall, spoke in very bad Italian, and actually found some people that I didn't know were down there. And that kind of just urged me to stay in Italy instead of going to Spain for the study abroad. You can imagine my parents were thrilled. "Mom, Dad, I'm not doing the study abroad I came for" But I got the money back, so they couldn't really say much. And I just stayed and kind of loafed around Italy for seven months, picked up some Italian while I was here, studied formally in Perugia, but then the earthquake hit in Assisi - that was 1997. I was in bed that night, and it was pretty shaky. And then I came back in 2002. At that point, I had changed universities, changed my major to Italian, Italian Language and Culture, and came back to Chapel Hill and lived in the San Lorenzo neighborhood, which is now where I do my food tours. That's how I fell in love with San Lorenzo.

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**Katy**

Oh, my goodness. And what spurred you want to do a food tour? What was the motivation behind that?

**Toni**

I started off in food photography, locations photography, and we're talking back on film. I used to work in a dark room. I did all kinds of things in college in photography, and I was really lucky in college. I got a job working for City Search. Do you remember City Search? Did you have that in Australia?

**Katy**

Yeah, we did. Oh, wow, that's a blast from the past.

**Toni**

Yeah, that's like right mid 90s and mid to late 90s. So they would pay me to go to a restaurant and get, you know, five restaurants would be the best hamburger in town, and I would go photograph all the hamburgers and then I got to eat the hamburger. And so for a college student, it was the ultimate nice. And they paid really well because it was like before the internet bubble burst. So it was a fantastic job. And then when I came over here, working as a photographer was not quite as easy. I didn't want to move to Milan and do fashion or move down to Rome because I just prefer Florence over Rome. And so I started working for a wine tour company. A friend of a friend of a friend introduced me to the owner and I already loved food, and thanks to him, I learned a lot about wine. I began taking the sommelier classes. I ended up dating a guy that worked in one of the wineries that I went to on the wine tour. I got to tell you, that job worked out great for me. And when I was doing the wine tours back then, I didn't see anybody doing food tours. I know there were a couple of people doing like a market tour where you do a cooking class, but an actual food tour where you taste little bites everywhere - I didn't see anyone doing them. And I was discovering everyone that took the wine tour loved the lunch and would say, oh, this is the best thing we've eaten on our whole trip. We've been so disappointed with the food in Italy. And I'd be like, wait, wait, wait a minute. I did not give up a photography career and move to Italy - I did not do all that to hear you say that the food is bad. So I started asking questions and I realized they were eating those giant sandwiches we were talking about before we talked about the other day, and slices of pizza, which in Florence, no one should eat a slice of pizza because that's not what we do here. They do great slices in Rome, but not up here. They're just eating the wrong food at the wrong time. And a lot of people, especially Americans, don't have a lot of time to research before a trip because we only get like two weeks vacation if we're lucky. So we just jump right into a trip (often haphazardly) and choose the wrong restaurants, the wrong sandwich, the wrong pizza, especially back then. That was before TripAdvisor. Can you imagine? It was before TripAdvisor.

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**Katy**

What do people do? I don't know.

**Toni**

I know, I know. And so that's why I started doing food tours. I wanted to make sure that people weren't leaving Italy thinking that the food was not as amazing as it is, especially Florence, because that's where I am and that's what I do. Yeah.

**Katy**

And I think if you think about Florentine food, it's not really I don't know, some of those local dishes aren't immediately obvious to a lot of people, like the carbonara is in Rome or the Cicchetti in Venice. So, yeah, I really enjoyed doing the food tour with you because I actually learned quite a few new little tasty bites that I hadn't had before.

**Toni**

Would you like to tell me an example of something that was new for you?

**Katy**

Oh, well, you know, the sandwich that we had, I really wanted to try Lampredotto, as you know, which is the tripe sandwich, but Toni introduced me to the beef brisket one, which was really I didn't even know that existed. So it was really tasty and just yummy with a green sauce on top and yeah, I could have gone back for a few rounds of that one, actually.

**Toni**

Right, yeah, that's the first thing I want to eat when I come back to Florence. There's a leftover piece today on the tour because I had an odd number in the group, and you probably noticed I don't eat a lot during the tour because I don't have my mouth full and everything. But during the break, I always eat one of those sandwiches if I can pull it off. When you guys are using the bathroom, I'm eating a sandwich and ordering pasta and stuff at the same time.

**Katy**

So what's the most satisfying thing about running these food tours for you? Because you've been doing it for quite a long time now, right?

**Toni**

Yeah, it's been 15 years. 15 years this September.

**Katy**

Wow.

**Toni**

It's hard to say because if someone asked me what my favorite gelato shop is, I have a very short term memory, so I'm thinking of recent. And for me, you sent me a really nice email. And I also had a woman from Ireland who conducts food tours in Ireland, she took my tour last week and she sent me an email, and both of you basically said, I've taken a lot of food tours and this was a really great one. And that's really satisfying for me because I've got to be honest, I was like, no pressure, Katy's taking my tour today. Coz I know you've taken a lot of tours and you get to do a lot of cool experiences, so that's really satisfying. And then also, I love when I convert a person who's not necessarily that into food, and by the end of the tour - it's like a metamorphosis. I've had usually food people marry or date food people, but every once in a while, you'll get the one person in the couple that really loves food and the other person that's like, "it's all going the same place". I had a roommate like that. It's all going to the same place. How sad is that? I remember I had this couple, they were on their honeymoon. She had never tried truffles. She had never tried a bunch of things. And he was kind of he looked like he had this look on his face, like, please help me, you know? And by the end of the tour, I had gotten her to try anchovies and truffles, and she was loving it because I think it's not just what you have a person eat, but how you introduce it, how you explain it. And also, like, portions, you know, if it's a tiny bite, people are not as afraid to try it.

**Katy**

It's a little bit intimidating if you have to order a whole dish and you think you might not like it, and then you just kind of ruined your evening or something like that. Yeah, I think that food tour is an amazing way to open people's eyes not just to the food culture, but also just the general vibe of the city. It's just a great way to discover, just uncover all those secrets of the city that you might not get even if you did, like a standard tour, you're not going to find out about it at the episode unless someone is specifically talking about paintings that feature food.

**Toni**

Right.

**Katy**

All right, so on your food tour, I just love the way that you pointed out the different food and wine. Things that you could bring home, and there were some I hadn't thought of. So that's what's really inspired this episode. So should we get started? Because I can't wait to hear some of your ideas.

**Toni**

Yeah, I have a list of 30 things. So technically one for every day of the month. It can kind of make it like that. And they're in no particular order because I just kept going. And so it's all over the map. But the first two are kind of in the same family. They're both drinks. So limoncello, which is kind of more obvious. Right. And then Vermouth. Vermouth, I think not as many people think about, but there's a lot of beautiful types of vermouth being produced in Italy now. Not just the classic ones, but now they're making vermouth in Sicily. I don't know if you saw when we were in the wine shop, the bigger wine shop, they had a whole wall of vermouth. And I'm not a big liquor person, but I like vermouth because it's kind of like a marriage between wine and hard alcohol. It's not quite here or there, and it's got all these beautiful, complex notes to it and kind of like gin, right? It's not always exactly the same.

**Katy**

Yeah, exactly.

**Toni**

So I think vermouth is a fun one.

**Katy**

That's a big vermouth tradition up in Piemonte, haven't they? Up in the north for their aperitivo?

**Toni**

Yeah, and I'm still learning about them. I have to be honest. My weak point is - if it isn't just straight up fermented grapes, I have no memory. Like, as soon as you start distilling alcohol or doing anything kind of out of the realm of just plain wine, that's where my memory gets a little cloudy. So Vermouth is my next pursuit. I really want to do that this winter because it's kind of a cold weather type drink, too.

**Katy**

Yeah, nice and cozy in your tummy. And just to bring those back from home, though, if anything is in bottles, you know what I love? I love those. Have you seen those wine wings or those special they're little, like, bubble wrap sleeves and you can just put everything inside them and they don't smash. And I managed to do that. I've got some stuff home just last week without any problems. But yeah, you can get them on Amazon. Are they really quite cheap? And just put them in your suitcase? Because you would want to buy something like a limoncello or something like that.

**Toni**

And they're great. They don't take up any room. They don't weigh anything. So they're easy to bring with you.

**Katy**

That's right.

**Toni**

So a couple of others so we have so many things. Sundried tomatoes. Now you can get sun dried tomatoes in your home country. But did we try the sun dried tomatoes when you were with me? The little cherry tomatoes?

**Katy**

Not this time, no.

**Toni**

I don't always have everyone try them because they're really salty. They're dried in the sun and then they're preserved. So you have to really, really rinse them before you cook with them. But there's these little tiny cherry tomatoes from Pachino in Sicily, and they're just like a next level as far as flavor and sweetness, and they're really good. And I have some recipes. They use some of these ingredients that I'll be talking about. I've got some recipes on my reels on Instagram. I do a very Italian style - here's what I'm doing. Figure it out. I don't give quantity or anything. Just watch what I'm doing and try to repeat it. But it's kind of a couple of fun recipes. And like the segway end of that pecorino cheese, because there's a next one. Now we're at number four, pecorino and Parmigiano Reggiano. You can find Parmigiano Reggiano at home, but it's way more expensive when you buy it outside of Italy. So if you love it, it's worth getting a big hunk of it under vacuum packing. Yeah.

**Katy**

I think some people are surprised that you can bring cheese. And even in Australia, you have to double check. You have to be very careful what you bring back into Australia. But I know the US. Is a lot more easy to bring some of these things back. But when we lived in the UK, we always used to buy vacuum packed cheese and bring it back. I think hard cheeses is fine, really, because it's really the soft cheeses they have a problem with. But you can ask for your hunk of cheese and they'll vacuum pack it right there on the spot. And then you have your cheese and you won't taste anything like it at home and you won't regret bringing it home when you get it home and you open it up and you eat it either alone or share it with friends and family. I've never regretted bringing cheese back. Never. Unless you try to sneak in a smelly one. That's all another episode - French cheeses.

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**Katy**

Well, actually, here in Australia, when you arrive back in Australia from overseas, they have these quarantine dogs which go and sniff everyone's luggage, and I'm sure they'd go absolutely crazy for a real stinky cheese.

**Toni**

I love dogs, but I'm never happy to see the dogs at the airport because I know what they're up to. I have managed to smuggle fresh mozzarella one time into Boston. I got stopped and everything, but then the woman next to me had like a bunch of different salumi in their suitcase - like salami, prosciutto. I mean, they had like a whole suitcase of pork. So the lady saw my suitcase and they let me through because they had so much stuff in that suitcase that I got really lucky. But really important in the cheese department. Let's talk about Pecorino, because, you know, everybody gets Pecorino Romano outside of Italy, and let's face it, there's way better Pecorino out there. Would you agree?

**Katy**

Well, I love the one from Pienza. Sometimes they put truffles in that one. So good.

**Toni**

Yeah, I mean, that's the fun thing about Pecorino, is you can have it young, medium aged, super aged, with truffle in it, with walnut leaves on the outside, with ashes on the outside, with wax on the outside, with tomato on the outside, with the pistachios in it. There's so many different fun things they do. To me, that's like a really fun thing to bring home, especially one that you won't find at home. Like the young one, the young one that you tried with me that was actually life-changing.

**Katy**

What was the name of that one again?

**Toni**

Pecorino Seggiano. They actually call it a dulce, like a sweet pecorino, because it's not really sweet, but it's really mild. And it's from Seggiano, which is in the south of Tuscany. I think you had mentioned Emiko, maybe. Was that you?

**Katy**

Yeah. So Emiko Davis, who's been on the show last year, she lived in the Maremma region. So it's from that region?

**Toni**

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It's from that area, yes.

**Katy**

Toni, you may not know this, but on our podcast we do actually talk about life changing cheese for our listeners. That is one of those cheeses.

**Toni**

I love it.

**Katy**

I was like, I've got to stop now because this could get really dangerous and there's a few more bites to come.

**Toni**

I'm telling you, I have a cheese addiction.

**Katy**

Yeah.

**Toni**

When I first started doing the food tours, each shop would only see me at that shop and they could not comprehend that I was going to other shops and feeding people's stuff. And they were feeding me, too. In the beginning, I had everything in my early 30s and had metabolism. And the cheese - I was at a point where I was like I didn't even realize that I was popping cheese like pills. I would come home after a day of eating cheese and eat more cheese. And my boyfriend at the time finally said, honey, I don't know if you've noticed, but your cheese intake has gotten a little dangerous. I was really troublesome how much cheese I was eating because also the sauces.

**Katy**

Okay, tell us about those.

**Toni**

So mostarda are like chutneys. They're all these fun little sauces. Sometimes they have mustard seeds in and that's where they get the name and it gives them a little zing. But sometimes they're just sweet or they're just tangy or whatever. And they can be anything from pear, fig, red onion, peppers, pumpkin. They do all kinds of fun chutneys with different things. So that beef sandwich we had, traditionally they would make mostarda to serve on the boiled meat. And it wouldn't have been on the sandwich. You would have just had that as your

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main course. But they're also really good on cheese. REALLY good on cheese. So that's one of the other things I love to take home, is anything in a little jar. Little jars are always good.

**Katy**

Little jars of surprise.

**Toni**

Hmm hmm. Then we have chocolate. Yeah, we have a lot of great chocolate in Italy. And there's a larger producers that you can get in the airport and the train station, and those are good. But I want to mention a smaller producer that's in Florence that I sometimes visit on the tours. Not as much lately because it's been so hot. They haven't started producing chocolate yet. They're just now starting in late October. Isn't that crazy? So it's called Vestri. Vestri. And I'll give you a link for this because they have a beautiful website. They have their own cacao plantation in Santo Domingo. So it has truly been the bar and really high quality, really good. There's a little shop in Florence and then the original shop is in Arezzo, but they have a whole thing set up on their website to order their chocolates. It's a great gift.

**Katy**

Goodness. Toni, you've just given me another reason to love Arezzo because I just love that. Yeah, I think the chocolate is something that's very different to typical taste that you would get in other Western countries where it's very heavy on milk and sugar additives. So it's a lot darker and richer and sort of more luscious, I think. So I really like the chocolate up in the north as well, from Piemonte, the Giandujotto. It's just so good, blended with hazelnuts, just yummy. So just go and seek out those local chocolate shops and yeah, like Toni you said, even the more mass produced ones are still very good, actually.

**Toni**

Yeah, we have a lot of great chocolate in Italy. And then speaking of things like that, because usually they go hand in hand, coffee, so coffee beans, coffee gadgets, so you can get like a little Moka, the little stove top - they call it a Moka. Moka, that little Italian classic Italian coffee maker that was invented by Bialetti. You can find those online now. You can find them sometimes even at like TJ Maxx or Home Good stores. But I also eventually give you a link that has just some things. I kind of looked up most of the stuff up on Amazon and I already have links for it.

**Toni**

Biscotti. So what we call Biscotti. In Tuscany, we call Cantuccini. In Rome they call them Tozzetti, and they have hazelnuts instead of almonds. So it's just a twice-baked cookie. But that word biscotto is like a biscuit, but it translates to twice baked. So it's all cookies are called biscotti, and then each place kind of has a formal name for them. And the ones that

we're calling biscotti around the world in Tuscany, we call them Cantuccini. In Rome they called them Tozzetti. Who knows how many other places in Italy have something similar, but they are considered very Tuscan. The Tuscans say they invented them, the Romans say they invented them, and they have different names for them, but that's by no means only biscotti. We have all kinds of beautiful cookies in Italy Baci di dama, which has its two little chocolate cookies with chocolate hazelnut filling. There's just so many things to eat here.

**Katy**

But also with the Cantuccini, you can also get the Vin Santo, which is a beautiful sweet wine. So you can like I'm just thinking about how you can make a suitcase. You just take your extra luggage and just make a whole dinner, several courses. You can have your cheese Cantuccini with your Vin Santo. I'm loving this idea.

**Toni**

It's like a gift hamper, a gift basket right there in your suitcase. And then another thing, nuts. So in Italy, we have amazing pistachios, a pistacchi from Bronte in Sicily. Pinoli - pine nuts, they grow all along the coast, and the umbrella pines. And then we have we have other nuts too, like almonds and walnuts, you name it, we have it the culinary utopia over here. But I would say the two that are worth bringing home with you, or pistachios and pine nuts.

**Katy**

Can we talk about the nut spreads? Because you definitely are allowed to bring that back because actually when I was there, I was looking very specifically for pistachio paste because I couldn't find it anywhere here in Melbourne, but I have since found it, which is good. So I actually bought three jars back because in our house, when we were in Italy and June, we bought back one jar and then I went to look into it because I wanted to make something and there was nothing left in the jar and no one would own up to who had been snaffling the pistachio paste. But let me tell you, it's so good. It's like nutella. Really. It's the same concept, isn't it? It's like nut spread, like nutella, but it's made with pistachios and it's so good.

**Toni**

And usually with white chocolate so it doesn't get covered up, like just pointing it out. Nutella is usually milk chocolate and hazelnut, and usually the pistachio spreads like white chocolate or condensed milk or something like that, and then really, really rich pistachio flavor.

**Katy**

So good. Yeah, so good. But even like, they have even versions of nutella that are not nutella, that are elevated. So definitely look for those as well, because I do like a nutella, let's face

it. But you can take it to the next level as well. So if someone really likes nutella that you know, then you can bring them home to a special jar and they'll just blow their mind.

**Toni**

Absolutely. Yeah. Vestri does he does white, dark and milk chocolate versions, and he even does one that's dairy free. He uses, I want to say rice milk instead of regular milk. And he has one that's vegan, one that's sugar free. So he has a lot of great options for people that want to be able to indulge, but maybe have dietary issues, which, as a food tour operator, I'm always thinking about the dietary issues. You're always going to be on top of it.

**Katy**

You're all over it.

**Toni**

I'm all over it, baby. So obviously may contain nuts guys, I can't do anything about the nuts that give a nut allergy that's rough.

**Toni**

Olive oil. Olive oil. I can't stress that enough olive oil that we get outside of Italy is usually not fresh. It's usually not, unless you live somewhere that makes olive oil, it's hard to get really good, high-quality oil. So that to me, is worth taking up some suitcase space because it's going to be harder to find when you leave Italy.

**Katy**

And what should we look for in the olive oil, Toni? Because there's just an abundance of olive oils out there, so you want to make sure you get the good one if you're going to be putting it in your luggage.

**Toni**

It's really hard because a lot of the labeling is very confusing and vague. So the number one thing you want to look for is fresh olive oil. Like right now, we're going to start pressing at the end of October. I think some people are already actually pressing because it's such a hot year. So you don't want to buy oil from 2021 after next week because the 2022 is going to come out. And you definitely don't want oil from 2020 because it's now two years old. So make sure the number one thing is that it's obviously extra virgin, the youngest one you can find, and then it depends on your taste. We make great oil all around Italy. The one that we make in Tuscany, of course, the Tuscans love their oil. The Umbrian love their oil. The Puglian love their oil. I've had great oil in all these different places, so I think the number one thing to look for is just freshness and an extra virgin combined, and then they're all going to be very

different. When you can try to taste it first, but if you're ordering it online, maybe order a smaller one first.

**Toni**

Make sure you like it. Never buy a giant tin or jug. That's never going to be a good thing unless you buy directly from a producer. But the things that those big stores I don't want to say the names of the stores, but the big stores that sell things in bulk and the olive oil in bulk is not going to be good.

**Katy**

Yeah, it's usually a blend of oils from potentially all around the world, and there's nothing wrong with olive oil from Spain or any of these other countries. But what it is is whether it's been mass-produced and how it's been harvested and pressed, and if it's being pressed by hand, let me tell you, it's so delicious.

**Toni**

Yeah, you want to get just the freshness is really important. And even the ones that are good and fresh that we're talking about, if they're old, like if you get the high-quality extra virgin that cost 30 Euro a bottle, guess what, folks? It's not going to be good three years from now, so use it. Stop saving it for a special occasion. That drives me crazy. I bring it to my mom, and then I go back two years later and the same oil is sitting there, and it's not good anymore. You don't want to save oil, use it liberally.

**Katy**

Go for it. It's good for you.

**Toni**

On the other hand, number ten on my list is the exact opposite. It loves time. It loves aging. I think you're going to guess what I'm about. As you can see from my face, you know how much I love this. Balsamic vinegar. Real balsamic vinegar. And then there's also lots of fun imitation balsamics, but true balsamic vinegar of Modena or Reggio Emilia, just right near Modena. It's just one of those things like the life changing cheese. Another thing that's life changing if you try it. You know someone that makes balsamics, right?

**Katy**

Yeah. We actually stayed at an Agriturismo and Emilia Romagna earlier this year, and we learned all about the process. We went to this it's called Acetaia Sereni, and they had a beautiful farm and a long standing tradition of making balsamic. And we also went with my friend Giulia there to the consortium there the museum, and learned all about different perspectives on making balsamic vinegar. And it was really interesting. But yeah, like, I think

if you can taste the traditional balsamic vinegar de Modena it's not what we put on salad, let's just say.

**Toni**

No.

**Katy**

No, it's thick and syrupy and delicious, and it goes very well with that cheese you just packed in your suitcase, too.

**Toni**

Oh, it's so fantastic. The museum. Do you mean the one in Spilamberto?

**Katy**

Exactly.

**Toni**

I love saying Spilamberto. It's my favorite word.

**Katy**

Yeah, it's such a beautiful little town as well. And we had the balsamic drizzled on some gelato, so I'm just saying that's a bit next level and life changing, too. Thank you to Giulia for that one.

**Toni**

Yeah, when you have the real balsamic, the DOP, on a high-quality, just plain crema gelato, or what we would call like a vanilla custard outside of Italy, it's just they're perfect together. And that's something you can easily order directly from an acetaia, from a producer. You could probably put the one you went to, and I can supply my link if you want to give that to everybody.

**Katy**

Yeah, let's do that. Yeah, for sure.

**Toni**

Because it's a family - I think something important to mention to everybody that's listening - is that it's a family operation. So you're in the house. I don't want to get too into this is a whole other episode, but..

**Katy**

Yeah that's in a whole other episode...

**Toni**

Very briefly. Just imagine you're in the house of these people instead of a winery where you have the wine cellar, you have the attic, and there's just dozens and dozens and dozens of barrels up in the attic, and each dozen or so barrels belongs to a different family member. And it's just magic. It's science, it's history, it's awesome.

**Katy**

It's all of those things. There is a lot of science that goes into it, but there's also an art as well. And a lot of love, I would say.

**Toni**

Yeah, I think that's why it's a great gift, too. I actually mentioned the mostarda - the little chutneys. That was number eleven on the list. I mentioned those earlier because I got out of order.

**Katy**

Okay, sorry, that was my fault.

**Toni**

Oh, no, that's not your fault. That's me having a short attention span and being very excited about this stuff.

**Toni**

Number twelve, olives, of course. Right? All kinds. We got the green ones, we got the black ones, we got the spicy ones. You can't miss out on the olives here if you like olives. And then in that kind of same family flavor, family capri, caper berries. And I like to buy them in the jar under salt. Yes, because they just have a whole different flavor. It's really good.

**Katy**

So good. Well, when we were in Sicily, we saw I've never seen a caper berry plant, actually, so I've seen them in Syracuse actually at the ruins. They're just dangling down all the little capers dangling off there, so temptingly. And they just added so much zinc to any dish. I love them. Yum.

**Toni**

They're so delicious. And also I've noticed a lot of places are doing fried caper. Now don't even get me started on how yummy that is. So good. It's crazy good. Just a couple of those thrown onto a pizza. Really good. Yeah. So that's a fun gift. Especially if you have a chef or someone who's really into cooking. That's a great thing to give someone.

**Toni**

This one's a little out there.

**Katy**

OK.

**Toni**

Bottarga. A little getting adventurous here. Bottarga. It's like a salted cured it's like the pouch of the fish roe. And it's usually mullet or tuna, at least to the ones that we get here. There are similar things in Japan and in Korea, but in Italy it's called Bottarga. And the most famous place for Bottarga is Sardinia, the island of Sardinia.

**Katy**

And what would you do with it?

**Toni**

It's really, really high in flavor. So when you get it, it almost looks like - you want to know what it is because otherwise it kind of takes you aback because it almost looks like somebody took a tongue out of somebody's mouth and put it under vacuum packing because it's about that size. Like a human tongue, too, not like a cow tongue. And it's just like really, really condensed fish roe. And so you just take it and you can just grate it over your pasta. So all you would need is some Bottarga, some spicy pepper flakes, some butter or olive oil, and maybe a garlic clove or two. You would just toss your spaghetti in there, things like that. It's really good. Yeah, it's one of those things you flavor things with.

**Katy**

Yeah, delicious. Always the best. Sounds like there'd be a lot of umami in that one.

**Toni**

Yeah, a lot of umami. And I'm so glad to use that word because number 15 on the topic of umami and fish, we're getting fishy for a couple of minutes here. Colatura di alici, which is the drippings (if someone hates fish, they're going to cringe when they hear this but it's so good) it's basically like a lot of Asian cooking. We use fish sauce, right? It's the same concept,

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they are very similar. In Roman times when they were making anchovies and sardines, anything under salt, they didn't want to miss out on that yummy yummy juice. So they would actually extract it, they would put containers underneath. I've actually gone and seen the ruins of one of these one time that would catch all the drippings, which is the Colatura di alici, the drippings of the anchovies or the sardines. And they just sell that in a bottle and you just put that on things like the pasta. So that on pasta you could do a little bit of Colatura di alici, a little bit of Bottarga, maybe some lemon zest. I love to put lemon zest and everything. It's really good. And it's kind of like when we were younger in college, maybe you just had, like, a can of tuna, and that was your survival food. This is next level survival fish. You always have it in the pantry, but it tastes way better.

**Katy**

Well, but speaking of tuna, I was actually gifted some homemade tuna from our dear friend Pierpaolo, who our listeners know very well, that's who's down in Sorrento - it was so good. I'm still dreaming about that tuna, but, like, you know, canned fish, it sounds just different, you know? And anchovies are another great gift, I think, as well, because especially the white ones. If you just think anchovies are furry fish or something like that, just think again. The white ones are just next level. Just put them on a little piece of bread and just a delicious lunch, I think.

**Toni**

Yeah, anchovy and a pat of unsalted butter. Love it.

**Katy**

Stop it.

**Toni**

Love it.

**Katy**

I haven't even had breakfast yet. Toni, this is terrible.

**Toni**

I know I haven't had dinner. I did it out of solidarity, so I'm hungry too.

**Katy**

Appreciate that.

**Toni**

One last fish item - Nero di seppia. Nero di seppia is just the squid ink, right? The black ink. And here I almost feel guilty sometimes. The things you can get for three euro at a grocery store in Italy, they have little packets of the Nero di seppia, and you put them in your refrigerator, and until you open them, they'll last for a couple of months. And it's just a perfect little thing you can bring home with you. I've never tried it. I'm assuming you can get that in. I do have a friend who's married to a Sardinian, and I have vetted. She has gotten Bottaga into the United States three times, so apparently that's okay. You want to get another vacuum packing? This is just like a little black juice in a packet. So I don't see why they wouldn't let it in. And then you just put that in, like a risotto or pasta. Just really nice thick spaghetti or linguine, and it's beautiful. There's a place in the countryside here that makes spaghetti with Nero di seppia, so the squid ink, fresh ginger and mussels.

**Katy**

Interesting.

**Toni**

Really beautiful combination. And there's another place that does Nero di seppia - it sounds really weird (I was like, I don't know) and then I fell in love with it. Nero di seppia and sage.

**Katy**

Okay

**Toni**

Mindblowing. I know, right? When you hear it, you think, what? But it's really good together.

**Katy**

Yeah. Interesting. Well, next time we'll be putting that on the list. Dishes to dry.

**Toni**

Number 17, saffron. Saffron - it grows in Sardinia, it grows in Tuscany. It was an important crop during, like, during medieval times around San Gimignano. It used to be used like currency. And there's a winery that actually I'm going to be giving you the link for olive oil, because they make really good olive oil, and they also produce saffron.

**Katy**

Beautiful.

**Toni**

So if you wanted to get saffron from them you could.

**Toni**

Pasta, of course, 18, 19, 20 pasta, rice, polenta. Obvious, but worth mentioning.

**Katy**

Yep. It just tastes different. I mean, yeah, we get some good Italian pastas here, but sometimes you find a really interesting one. Like I mentioned, our friend Piepaolo, he gave us this really cool one that had all like, serrated edges. It's like big papardelli with serrated edges, and it was just so good. We just gobbled that one up. Thanks, Pierpaolo.

**Toni**

Yeah, I love a pasta that has good texture. It holds the sauce. Also, I throw in into the pasta department. Don't have it on my list of 30, but pasta sauces, good. Ragu sauce, anything like a good pesto. The sky is the limit. There's so many things to eat here.

**Toni**

Number 21, herbs and spices. So of course, there's a million places we could go with that. Saffron falls into that category. But oregano, because oregano outside of Italy usually is horrific. It's nothing like the real one and the one in Sicily and Calabria - beautiful. So that's worth bringing home under vacuum, packing, dry, of course - it's got to be dry. Pepperoncino. The spicy peppers from Calabria, also dry. You can get them whole. You can get the seeds of the powder. Totally worth bringing home. Fiore di finocchio is the fennel flower, like the flower of the wild fennel plant. And then they dry it and that it doesn't weigh anything and it's really good on everything. Did you pick that up? Because you can't bring it back.

**Katy**

Can't bring that one back to Australia.

**Toni**

Unfortunately, but maybe it grows in the countryside.

**Katy**

I need to look into that because I'm not going to mention who, but we do know some Italian people that did manage to snaffle some seeds back in here. This was in the 1950s, though, so we don't need to call quarantine department just yet.

## Toni

And then also the spices that the butchers make. And you can make this at home. So if you're in Australia, you can just get the ingredients and make it. It's rosemary, sage, salt, pepper, garlic, and fennel seeds all mashed together. And it's a beautiful rub. And you can put it on your potatoes, you can put on your fish, your lamb, your chicken. It's really good. Or if you want to make porchetta, if you want to try to make a homemade porchetta.

## Katy

Uh. Stop it Tony.

## Toni

I know! You're going to pilates after this. 22 yummy things with truffles. And when I say truffles, I don't mean chocolate truffles, I mean tartufi, I mean the little tuber mushroom guy. And my new favorite thing is the guy in the market that I go to that has the fennel flower and the tomatoes. He also has it's like a pepper shaker, but instead of pepper, it has dehydrated truffle in it.

## Katy

Oh, my goodness.

## Toni

And you just grate that on things. It's raining truffle. It's raining and truffle, baby, forget about raining men. Raining truffle. And I do have, if anybody wants to get, because you said where can I buy it, so I'm just throwing some links at you. If anybody wants to buy truffled products that are high quality, I can send you a link for that. There's one in Tuscany that's really good. They have truffle oil, truffle salt, truffle butter, truffle cream, little dwarf peaches. They're dwarf peaches that they look like an olive. I only learned about them because of these. They're like pickled, and then they're under oil, the truffle oil, and they're beautiful. If you're a martini person, when it gets really fancy and make a really sexy martini.

## Toni

And then we've got 23 porcini, dried porcini mushrooms, and why stop there? They've got chanterelle. They've got all kinds of great stuff. You can get all kinds of porcini dried under vacuum packing.

## Toni

Wine, gadgets. So nice wine openers. But the thing that everybody's really going crazy for now, it's called a centellino, and I will make sure to send you that so it can be spelled out properly. You could probably find it online, even maybe from the producer or otherwise it could be ordered from the wine shop that we go to on the tour. And it's just a doser and a

decanter. It's awesome. Everybody loves it. Everybody goes totally wild over it. Yeah, you liked it? You got one?

**Katy**

I got one. I meant to get one last time and I forgot. And it's like it's like a little bubble, isn't it? And then you sort of stick it into the top of the wine bottle and it aerates the wine as you're pouring it. But it also measures out a perfect glass. So if we're saying you're having a dinner party or you open a really special bottle of wine and you wanted to make sure everyone got exactly the right amount, then that's the way to do it.

**Toni**

Yeah, it's perfect. Or if you have maybe you have a special bottle that's an old vintage and you only have one bottle. And like you were saying, you want to make sure everybody gets enough. It's the perfect little gift. Or if you own a wine bar, it's great because it's easy to dose out your wine. I have the old one. The one that you have is the new one, the more modern one. I love the shape because it has that little beak on it or almost looks like a little amphora, like a little miniature amphora made out of glass.

**Katy**

Yeah, you're right.

**Toni**

It's really beautiful. Mine is like the original one was literally a bubble. It's just a little round guy, and it doesn't work as well. It's really interesting to see the progression.

**Katy**

Always improving. That's what I love about the Italians.

**Toni**

Number 25, olive wood.

**Katy**

Olive wood?

**Toni**

Yeah. I'm going to go into a couple of instruments and then we're going to finish off with one more food.

**Katy**

Ok.

**Toni**

25 olive wood - cutting boards, spoons you name it. There's all kinds of fun stuff. I'll give you a link for that. I wanted to find one that has a bunch of stuff, so I sent you one that's kind of general, because the little shop in Florence isn't really, they're not really good at shipping. The one that I would recommend here in town, a lot of these places, they're like, they don't have Facebook, they don't have Instagram, they can't be bothered. They want to leave and go home.

**Katy**

And this is such an important point, right? And this is why we try to explain to people that you can't find a lot of this stuff online. And like I was saying, I found it really difficult to find a pistachio paste, which is something that's quite straightforward. But if you really want some of these unique things, or not even just to buy, but just to experience and check out, just a different way of life, you're not going to find it on Google. So that's why you do join a food tour or you do get really involved in local culture, whichever way you choose to do that. And I mean, like, I do think a food tour or any type of really deep, immersive local tour is the best way to do that because you just won't find it on Google. Sorry, folks.

**Toni**

Yeah, I agree. Or if you do find it on Google, there's a thing called Google Ads, so it might be the keyword that you're getting something that somebody paid for you to see. It's easy to get disoriented when you're looking for all these things.

**Toni**

Yes, number 26 ceramics.

**Katy**

Yes

**Toni**

I have a very bad ceramics habit. I have to cut myself off because I don't have enough room for all of it. But you can get beautiful bowls for your salads and your pasta. Down in the Amalfi Coast, they actually have a thing - I don't even know how to describe it. It's like a cylinder, and then on top of it is a colander that looks like a lid, but it's a colander and you put your mozzarella in there because your mozzarella should be in the water until you eat it. It's like, honestly, who has space for all this stuff, right? But if you wanted to, you could get one of those. But my favorite number one thing, if you're going to buy one ceramic thing, is a

good container to put your olive oil a little receptacle because it keeps out the light. It's good for temperature, and it's just the right size, so you're not putting all your oil in there at once.

**Toni**

27 knives. We have beautiful handmade knives in Scarperia, which is north of here in Tuscany and also in Sardinia. And Sardinia, they're like a really big deal. If someone makes a knife for you, it's a very special thing, kind of like balsamic vinegar. It's something that traditionally you made for a family member special occasion, that kind of thing. And knives were really important for defense back in the day, but also for survival, because, you know, I mean, now we just use it maybe to cut some pecorino. But back in the day, you're hunting or cleaning your animal, use your knife for everything. So beautiful knife is always a cool thing. And then going a little more fancy.

**Toni**

Now, Venetian glass, you know, a lot of the time I think of those vases and things like that, but they have the most delicate, gorgeous glasses in Venice that I mean, they look like they would just break if you touch them. But hey, if you got in your budget, please get some because they're gorgeous.

**Toni**

And then also here in Florence, Ginori. Richard Ginori, his porcelain, beautiful plates. So instead of something like Wedgwood, if you really want to be Italian, get some Richard Ginori.

**Toni**

And then number 30, we made it honey. I'm back to food for a second because honey represents a place just like wine does - your terroir. And there's all kinds of honey. But I've just got my top three.

**Katy**

Okay, go for it.

**Toni**

Chestnut. Beautiful. It's got kind of a bitter that's got some umami and some bitterness to it. Corbezzolo, though, which has all these different good qualities for your health. And then those are naturally getting those flavors from the pollen and the bees and all that stuff. If you want to get honey with something thrown in truffle honey. Truffle honey is very yummy. Yeah. So that's all I've got for you. I know it was a very short list.

## Katy

Oh, my goodness. I mean, you can literally just keep going and going. And I think one of the things that you can do when you're in Italy is you can go to the market or you can go to these specialty stores. I mean, I remember when we stayed in .Santa Margherita Ligure They have a really amazing store there called Seghezzo. And it's like a treasure trove of these all these amazing things. And you can usually find a shop like this in most places that you go. I mean, Modena is a great example. The market there is fantastic and all of that. But if you can't find if you're craving them and I think this has been a little bit mean, actually, for some people, including myself, because most people have probably finished their travels in Italy this year. But you can actually buy quite a few things online from some reputable places. I know Roscioli in Rome do ship internationally their food, and everyone knows that's my favorite restaurant in Rome and Italy in the US. Also have a pretty good selection. It's quite pricey. But if you were really craving some of this stuff, I know they do make a pretty good effort to seek out this.

## Katy

But if you wanted to go direct to the producers in Italy, I know Toni is going to give us a whole list of places where you can go. And I also just wanted to mention our lovely friends at KM Zero Tours who are based in Tuscany and they do a lovely box of Tuscan goodies each year for Christmas and throughout the year if you want the selection issue taken out of your hands.

## Toni

Yeah, they're really reputable. They're really nice.

## Katy

Yeah, they're fantastic. So Toni, I have no doubt that our listeners are inspired to leave room in their luggage or take an extra suitcase or get online to start their holiday shopping right now. Because we are just in the lead up to Christmas and when we're recording this. But I also know that they'd be keen to stay in touch with you too. So how can people find you and taste Florence online and get some information on your tours?

## Toni

My website for the food tour is tasteflorence.com. There's no 'of' in there, just Tasteflorence.com. And then on Instagram. Same name, tasteflorence. I'm on Facebook, but trust me, you don't want to look. I always forget about Facebook, I just never post on there. And also the same thing with Twitter. Once a year I write on Twitter. So if you want to see the essence of me, my food tour is what I'm about. I would say Instagram because that's a lot of food photos. I'll send you a link. I've got a shopping list with a bunch of things that you can get. Worst case scenario, you get onto Amazon and you get the stuff. Of course, I prefer going to a producer, but for cheese and things like that. I found that Amazon has good pecorino and good so I broke down and put that on there. Visitors guide on my website - I've got places all

over the Anglo Saxon or the English-speaking world. So places in South Africa, Australia, I think I've got New Zealand, UK, United States, some Italian delis and stores and stuff that are reputable. There's actually a really, really good one in Florida. Is it Saint Augustine? St Petersburg! The one near Tampa, which is the St that's near Tampa, I always forget because I have family all over Florida. It's really good. People tell me that there's going to be a good Italian Deli and I'm like, "we'll see" and I go there and usually I'm like, yeah, whatever this place was. So I mean, I stayed there for 4 hours. I had fun in there. So I've got all those on my website. I've got a link for that. A link for a Balsamic producer - there's tons, this is just someone that I have a good relationship with. Most likely will be giving you a link for the olive oil. I don't know if they have a good yield or not. If they do, they'll be selling it online. Olive wood knives, chocolate, truffles - I've got all those links for you.

**Katy**

Oh we so appreciate it. Amazing. Toni well, like everyone seriously, as you know, I do quite a few tours and experiences, and I really loved my few hours with Toni, traipsing through Florence and trying lots of different things. And at the end, we visited this amazing wine store. What was the name of that one again?

**Toni**

The one on the tour? Enoteca Alessi. I can also put a link for that because they have the Centellino. .

**Katy**

Okay yeah, it's really amazing. And when you get out of a food tour is you can go visit these places yourself, but when you do get out of a food tour is you get the guide and you won't find half of this stuff if you don't go because it's so overwhelming. You need someone to come there and help point it all out for you. I think it's really an amazing experience and I had a great time. So Grazie Mille Toni, thank you so much for joining me on Untold Italy today. Thank you.

**Toni**

I had fun. Yeah. And I hope that you enjoy your pilates and go and eat something healthy afterwards.

**Katy**

Will do. Thank you so much.

**Katy**

I hope you got some great ideas for food gifts to bring home from Italy and places to buy them at home if you get that certain craving like the one in our house for pistachio cream! At

the time of recording, we're just a few weeks away from Christmas so perhaps you have some ideas for gifts for your Italy-loving friends and family this year

In past years I know some of our followers have given Italian gift baskets as a hint present for the real gift they are giving - a trip to Italy! What a fantastic idea. I absolutely love it.

And on that note, if you're thinking, like me, that a trip to Italy is the best gift of all, we'll be releasing new Untold Italy tour itineraries in hidden regions and delving into the lesser-known places in classic destinations for 2023 and 2024 very soon and just in time for Christmas. So stay tuned for those announcements here on the podcast, via email and on our social media channels.

Of course, we've put all the details of the food and wine gifts we mentioned and places to buy them into the post show notes at [untolditaly.com/146](https://untolditaly.com/146) for episode 146 as well as Toni's website and social media handles for Taste Florence with details on how to join one of her wonderful food tours there. The food tours would also make an amazing gift don't you think?

Grazie Mille! Thanks for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did we would love it if you shared it with your Italy-loving friends and family. Grazie to those of you who have already done this. Untold Italy is now in the top 10 travel podcasts in the United States, Canada, and Australia which is so exciting. And it's all thanks to you. Grazie Mille! Thank you

That's all for today, on next week's episode we're heading north to Venice to take a bite of its unique food culture with a favorite guest Valeria Necchio but until then it's "ciao for now".