

Untold Italy Episode 153 - Christmas Markets in Northern Italy's South Tyrol region

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 153.

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 and Buon Natale! Merry Christmas to you all. It's hard to believe that it's that time of year already. I don't know about you but 2022 has absolutely zipped by for me - in a good way. It's been a whirlwind but so great to reconnect with friends abroad and meet in person people we've only known via a screen.

I'm thoroughly grateful for being able to spend so much time in Italy this year and am looking forward to our plans for 2023 including visiting the region we're talking about today - South Tyrol!

This northern Italian region may win the prize for most Christmassy spot in Italy thanks to its snow-capped mountains, chocolate box pretty villages, and fun local markets and traditions... it truly defines the term winter wonderland

Joining us today are our friends Kate and Vin whose website Throne and Vine is an excellent resource for those of you who want to travel in this beautiful region. I can't wait to hear all about how to experience the magic of South Tyrol in the lead-up to Christmas so let's welcome them back.

Katy

Benornati. Welcome back Kate and Vin. Welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast.

Kate

Thank you for having us. We're excited to be here.

Vin

Yes, it's good to be back.

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Katy

Oh, I've missed you. I've missed you. Have you been did you spend much time in south Tyrol this year?

Kate

We did. We just got back a couple of months ago after having a fabulous trip there, over to the Dolomites, a little bit of time in Merano. So it was lovely.

Vin

Yeah, the weather was perfect. I know that summer was really hot there, but when we arrived in the fall, it was average temp, so great hiking weather.

Katy

I reckon Fall is like - it's honestly my favorite time to visit Italy. It's just the right balance of everything, I think.

Vin

Yeah, it's our favorite time too. Plus they have all the festivals, the harvest festivals that take place, so it's just kind of a good time to go there, get a little bit of adventure and a little bit of culture at the same time.

Kate

In a beautiful setting.

Katy

Yes, it's amazing. But today we're going to talk about Christmas and the snowy mountains and the shimmering lakes and all the beautiful towns all lit up for Christmas. But before we delve into what it's like in the lead up to Christmas in northern Italy, can you please introduce yourself to our listeners? Some people may not have heard your former episodes.

Kate

Yeah, absolutely. I'm Kate.

Vin

And I'm Vin.

Kate

And we have been going to South Tyrol for about ten years now. And we had originally planned to go to Venice and just do a quick stopover in South Tyrol. And then the second we got to the South Tyrol portion of our trip, we wanted to cancel the rest of it. Just stay in that region, we just loved it immediately. The beauty, the culture, all of it was just fantastic. And being able to have a mix of both the Alpine and Mediterranean climates. So we came back and then went a couple more times because we were just addicted at that point. We started our blog of Throne and Vine, where we now get to share a lot of that, our love for it with everybody else.

Vin

Yeah. And for those that don't know South Tyrol, it crowns the northern part of Italy, so it sits on the border of Austria, next to Switzerland, and it's about 80% mountains, so it's a very beautiful landscape in terms of the natural scenery that you can encounter. You can be one moment looking at a snow-capped mountain and the next moment looking at a palm tree. So it's a really unique blend of alpine that kind of collide together. And then the other really unique aspect of South Tyrol is that 70% of the people, they actually speak German. So it's a very Germanic region of Italy, so you get this mix of Italian and German culture coming together, which is really interesting because it somehow works. You wouldn't think so, but it does. So from cuisine to architecture, you really get the best of both worlds there.

Katy

It's so, so pretty. And it could almost be the most Christmassy region of Italy. When I think people think of European Christmas, they're thinking of those snow-capped mountains and little chalet villages. And the best thing about South Tyrol is you have that - plus pizza.

Kate

Exactly. What more could you want?

Katy

So what we were going to do today for our listeners was to tell everyone, because I think people maybe know that there's a lot of Christmas markets that they can visit in Switzerland and Austria and Germany, and they're very, very popular. But people may not know that there are also Christmas markets in Italy. And I think it's a really special thing to do. Anyone's thinking of going over in winter. And I know Katy and Vin have been to many of them. So why don't we kick it off and you can tell us a bit about the Christmas markets and what they're all about in South Tyrol?

Vin

Sure. Yeah. There's actually more Christmas markets in South Tyrol than anywhere else in Italy. There's five original markets that take place, so pretty much every town and village there does have a Christmas market. But there's five main ones that we should cover today. They take place in all the major towns. So the first one is in Bolzano, which is the capital of South Tyrol. Then Merano, Brixen, Sterzing and Brunico. So we've been to four of those and each town is transformed into winter wonderland, fairy tale. So pretty much from the beginning of town to the end of town, you're walking through a paradise of lights and garland and Christmas trees and bows and all sorts of aromas. So it's really fantastic place to go celebrate Christmas in the markets. Typically they begin the last week of November and run through the first week of January.

Katy

So where was the best one that you went so far?

Kate

For me, I would say it's probably Merano is one of my favorites. It's all so scenic and it's set along the river. It's a promenade, so it's just lovely out there. And it's so picturesque being able to walk along the river and visit the different Christmas village and see all of the different decorations. So that's probably one of my favorites on the Merano side.

Vin

Yeah, I would say my favorite takes place in Brixen. And Brixen is the oldest town in South Tyrol, so you're surrounded by history. I believe it was founded in more than 1100 years ago and has a lot of narrow alleys and walkways, so you kind of feel like you're transported back in time when you go there. And the Christmas market itself, it's about 40 stalls that take place in the cathedral square, which is in the old town of Brixen. And it's right underneath one of the most beautiful cathedrals in South Tyrol. When it's lit up at night. It looks like it's pretty much made for Christmas. Just the way they shine the lights on it. And it has these two giant bell towers that are really gorgeous to look at. But what really makes that market special is they do a light and music show in the Bishop's Palace and that's a really neat production. It's like a multimedia projection that they cast on the outer walls of the palace and they pretty much come alive with a fairy tale story. I've never seen anything like it. The story changes year to year, but that's something that makes it really magical.

Kate

Yeah, it really makes buildings come to life. When you see these characters cascading across the walls, it's incredible to see.

Katy

And they do that so well. I think it's really artistic and thoughtful and considered. You can really get sucked into it. And they last for a while too, don't they? The whole scene?

Kate

Yeah, it goes on for a while and you kind of tour around the building. It's usually a standing room only and you're just kind of moving with the crowd throughout and seeing the whole building. So some parts that you can get up close to where you can watch from a distance. So it's very immersive feeling.

Katy

And at these places, I'm sure they would probably have snacks that you can enjoy if you're watching the light show.

Kate

Oh, yes, snacks are a must. Definitely where I need to go. Yeah. One of our favorites is these cookies that are called Spitzbuben cookies and they have some kind of a jam in them. Usually the ones that I like the best are the ones with the apricots, but they're a little bit of a little bit of fruit, a little bit of Christmas cookie. So just a lovely, lovely treat. And then you can also always get your apfelstrudel. And then they have things like Glühwein, so you can get your wine, but it's a spiced wine or a mulled wine and it's heated up and delicious. You can warm up with a little bit of flair.

Vin

Yeah, it tastes like Christmas in a mug. That's how I describe it. So imagine a glass of red wine, but now you add some cinnamon sticks to it, some orange, slices of orange and cloves. It's a really flavorful drink. And when you're walking through the market, you can kind of smell it anywhere. It's almost just smelling it makes you tipsy. We could sit at the market all night and just sit on that by a fire. It's a fun experience. The other neat thing with Glühwein is it's very easy to make at home. So Kate does a great job putting together a batch every Christmas season for us.

Katy

Oh, amazing. You can have a little bit of South Tyrol at home. I love it. I think it's really interesting how they always have those sweet treats. It's not so much the savory.

Kate

Oh, yes. I'm a huge sugar maniac too, so it's ideal for me.

Vin

I feel like about every other stand that you encounter is filled with gingerbread. It's just cookies everywhere. So if you're going to go to the market or recommend dieting for a month ahead of time, because I don't think you can walk 10ft without wanting to buy something.

Katy

You're probably going skiing as well if you're there at that time of year.

Vin

That's true. Actually, we recommend if you're a winter sports lover, tying in a visit to South Tyrol during the holiday season with a ski trip is perfect. They have actually the biggest ski destination in the world. It's called Dolomiti Superski, and you get one ski pass, and that covers 450 different lifts throughout the Dolomites. So it's incredible. You could literally go there and never ski the same run twice.

Katy

Wow. And is it suitable for beginners?

Vin

Oh, yeah, definitely. It's like any other major ski destination. There's going to be black diamond runs and there's going to be the green easy runs that you can take. And even if you don't like to ski, there's plenty of places to go to still do hiking in November and December. Alpe di Siusi, which is the largest alpine pasture land you can hike that year-round.

Katy

Okay.

Vin

They maintain the trails and the huts are open, so you don't have to be a snow-bum to enjoy it.

Katy

We talked about Merano and Bolzano, but they're quite big towns, and I'm sure the markets are pretty bustling and people would come from all over to go to those ones, wouldn't they?

Kate

Yeah, for sure. Especially Merano and Bolzano are definitely the two biggest and going to be the busiest.

Vin

Yeah, I think Bolzano is actually the largest Christmas market in Italy. I believe they have like 80 stands, and it takes place in the Piazza Walther, which is kind of like Bolzano's living room, or it's been considered that for the last 900 years anyways. And the market takes place around a giant marble statue of I'm going to mispronounce the name, but Walther. Walther der Vogelweide.

Katy

That's a mouthful.

Vin

He was basically a rock star back in the Middle Ages. He was one of the first troubadours that traveled around to different kingdoms and played music for the royalty.

Katy

I think Walter sounds like he'd be pretty cool. Do they have music at the Christmas markets as well?

Kate

They do a lot of the time. Sometimes they have actual concerts where they might bring out, like in Merano they might bring out a whole orchestra or band, but then they usually have just small musicians playing throughout the market, too. So it's kind of a mix.

Vin

Yeah, you can find street musicians just playing a flute or a trumpet, and then sometimes they'll have a concert, a special event that takes place. Like, for example, in Merano along the river, there's the Kurhaus, which is an event center. And they hold concerts there inside. And it's just a gorgeous hall built, I believe, in the early 19 hundreds. And it's a great setting for catching some live music.

Katy

Got everything, haven't they? What about if you wanted to do some shopping? Do they have like, local crafts and things like that at the markets as well.

Kate

Yes, lots of local crafts and things that are made locally. That's one of the things that we like the best about it. And it's a great spot to do all of your holiday shopping. Get all of that in right before the holidays. And it's so many unique things. One of my favorite things I have

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been collecting is wooden rings that have various different colored gems on top of them. So I get a different ring each time we go with a different color. It's kind of fun.

Vin

Yeah, you can find all sorts of wood carvings and actually, when you're walking through, you might even come across an artist in the process of carving a statue or a figurine. And that's kind of neat to watch as well.

Katy

I'm sure there's Christmas decorations there as well. My mum collects Christmas decorations, so I'm sure you can get some lovely ones there too.

Kate

Yes, we just picked them up for our family our last trip, actually. So it definitely is.

Vin

Yeah. I would say probably 50% of the stands sell some sort of unique ornament and it's all authentic. And they actually have workshops too, where they teach you how to make them, which is really neat. You got to make them in the traditional Tyrolean style.

Katy

And so are the markets on every day, all day, every day, or are they only on at certain times?

Vin

So the five main markets that I mentioned, they take place every day and it's usually from 10:00 a.m. To 07:00 p.m. Sometimes on the weekends they go a little bit later. They might have, for example, Bolzano has a wine lounge. Yeah, you can go in there and try multiple different wines from all over Bolzano, so it stays a little bit old, open later on the weekends. And then there's also boutique markets that take place throughout South Tyrol, for example, in Tyrol Castle, which is one of the oldest castles in the region, they do a small Christmas market and I think it takes place two weekends, so you have to kind of time it right if you want to visit that. But that's a really neat market because you can take a horse carriage ride to the castle. So it's almost like you're thrown back a couple hundred years. And there's this really neat tunnel that you go through inside the mountain to get to the castle. So it's a really unique experience.

Vin

And there's also another really fun market that takes place in Lago di Carezza, which is a lake in the Dolomites.

Kate

Yeah, when we went to that one too, it was just starting to get dark at night. And then we started to hear some of the bells and signs of the Krampus that are coming with their big evil masks down the walkway. So what happens is they have these demonic creatures that are considered half human, half animal, that come out at Christmas time to remind children to be good and behave or they won't get anything for Christmas and instead they'll get hit with a switch.

Vin

Yeah. So they have these they call them Krampus runs or parades. They kind of take place throughout the holiday season. But the big night for the Krampus runs is December 5, which is the feast of St. Nick. And so a lot of the villages and towns will have a Krampus run event and it's almost like going to a concert. They have huge stage lighting that's very elaborate, pyrotechnics. And you stand there and you're basically looking down a dark alley waiting for something to happen. And everyone is, of course, there drinking and having a good time, and all of a sudden they flip the lights on and you're kind of blinded, like the spotlight shining at you. And then these giant flames rise up in the air and this high energy comes on and just thumping. And next thing you know, you see these giant creatures with horns and fangs emerging from the shadows at you. I knew what to expect, sort of, but I was still scared to death. You know, it's all just for fun. But they look the masks are so detailed and they're actually wearing a goat fur. And the horns on the mask are actually real horns, apparently.

Katy

Wow. Is this a tradition that goes back a long way?

Vin

It's a tradition - I think it began in the 1100s in the Alps. From what I've read, it was a tradition to make kids behave, and I think it makes adults behave too. But they actually run at you and they have the switches, which are the bundle of sticks and yeah, they're not shy about hitting you.

Katy

Oh, my goodness. Nostrudel for you - wack.

Vin

Right. But that's a really fun tradition. I think they have, like, over a dozen different runs that take place that coincide with the Christmas markets. In fact, the oldest Krampus run, and I think it's the largest, has over 600 Krampus that take place in the run. And that takes place in

Toblach, over in the eastern part of the Dolomites. We haven't been to that one yet, but I have to imagine that's pretty terrifying.

Katy

So would they make their own mask?

Vin

Yeah, they're wood-carved mask. Very expensive because they're all custom-made and painted. I don't know how much they cost if someone were to buy one, but I would have to guess over \$500 a piece.

Katy

And so what do I wear on the bottom? Is it just like normal jeans and...

Kate

No, they get all into it. It's completely covered in fur.

Vin

It's like a goat skin jacket. And pants and cowbells, so you can kind of hear them walking down the street before you see them. So you hear the ringing of the bells and you know they're coming and everybody is anticipating them emerging from the darkness and it's just a really neat experience.

Kate

Yeah. And then the children start crying and everybody.

Vin

Yeah, but then after they're on, after they're done terrifying everybody and punishing all the kids, they'll take off the mask and everybody sits around and has a cup of Glühwein or a beer. So you get to make friends with the Krampus.

Katy

Thank goodness for that. It sounds almost Pagan tradition, really, like harking back to well before Christian times. Having lived in the UK where they have similar kind of traditions over there with the Celtic traditions, it's really interesting to see them evolve and maybe don't take the kids, but you're unlikely to see a celebration like that in, well, definitely in our country, but I think it's completely unique and interesting. How fascinating. Love it.

Vin

Yeah, I don't think we have them. I've never been to one in the States. I'm sure they take place some places, but actually they're really neat a place to bring the kids. Because the market we were at in Lago di Carezza, we're expecting the first Krampus that we saw coming out the trail to be these giant beasts. And it turned out they were just kids in Krampus costumes, and they were so terrifying.

Katy

They're into it too. I love it.

Vin

I was ready to run and I was like three-foot-tall monsters coming at you.

Katy

I just love those type of traditions. It's just so different, isn't it? Is there any other type of traditions like that that you've come across?

Kate

The only other tradition I can think of is really just the Glühwein probably is probably the biggest thing. And really there's a lot of interacting with family and friends and a lot of that type of celebration and just getting to celebrate with the people that you have in your life, I would say is probably another.

Vin

Yeah, it's a very Catholic part of - well every part of Italy's Catholic. But the region has a lot of traditions revolving around some of the traditional dates related to the Catholic Church. So they do celebrate different feast dinners that take place throughout the holiday season.

Katy

Going back to the Glühwein. Do they all have their secret recipes? Like there's a secret recipe for each town?

Kate

They don't so much have that. If anything, it'll be maybe a family has a particular ingredient that's a secret ingredient, but it's a lot more honestly about the wine they tell you than anything else. So if anything, it's more particular about the wine that they've chosen.

Vin

But you can also make the Glühwein more potent by adding brandy or rum to it. So they may do that and they may not tell you, but after one mug, you know that you've had something different.

Katy

Yeah. And you probably feel a bit warm in your tummy. Quite tasty. I love it. Was there any other particular markets that you really found really interesting?

Kate

Yeah, so one of my other favorite markets is at the Forst Brewery. It's a very large brewery that they have, and it spans across the roadway, so they decorate both sides and get incredibly into the holidays period.

Vin

It's called the Christmas Forest. It just transformed the entire brewery into this. It's a fairytale wonderland.

Kate

Yeah. They have a skating rink that they set up, and you can rent out different spaces to have a private dinner, and they really decorate the whole beer garden. So you really feel completely immersed in this Christmas world, which is just a lot of fun. And they have little surprises throughout that you can just run into that are really neat and fun.

Vin

Yeah. And the brewery itself is fascinating just to walk-through. It's the oldest one in South Tyrol.

Kate

Yeah.

Katy

I guess when people think of Italy, they don't think of beer so much, do they?

Vin

No, but this is the Alps, so it kind of fits.

Katy

Yeah, for sure. What's the story behind this brewery? It's been there for a while.

Vin

Yeah. I think it was founded in the 1800s. And if you go to any mountain hut in South Arco, you're going to see Forst on tap. It's the predominant beer. I think they have multiple brewery restaurants located throughout the region, too, because you'll go where could you have other taverns? You can go into any town and see a Forst beer sign in and off a building, but it's a really unique destination. And if you're going to be going to the Merano Christmas market, you really should plan to also go to the Forst Brewery. It's located about 15 minutes from Merano in Algund, and it's just in a beautiful setting. I'd recommend going there and having dinner. We probably spend a couple of hours just hanging out. And of course, you can rent ice skates, like Kate said, and go skating in their rink, which is really neat. It's kind of tucked in behind these old buildings and looks like you're skating up in the mountains almost.

Katy

I love ice skating. It's so much fun. It feels so wholesome.

Vin

I think it's liberating.

Katy

So what do they have for dinner there? Is it like a typical kind of German-style dinner? I imagine it would be?

Kate

Yes. They actually lean a little bit more South Tyrolian, so it's a little bit of a combination of the Italian and the German influence mixed together. So sometimes one of the things that I like to get is some of the pasta with more of a venison, kind of a heavier meat that you maybe wouldn't see as much of in the southern part of Italy. That's one of my favorites. And then some of the other traditional things that you just find typically like your Speckknödel

Vin

Yeah Speckknödel, that's basically a baking dumpling. You can serve it in a soup or on a plate with some lettuce and you can get it in different styles. You can get it with cheese, spinach, very popular dish that's been around since the Middle Ages.

Kate

And one of the cool things about Forest, too, is that they also do a really festive dinner too, called their Felsenkeller, and they have a multi-course dinner within their cellar, that's plated. And you can go and have kind of a big festive dinner with a large group of people. That looks like a really cool experience.

Vin

Yeah, it takes place in kind of this cavern-like setting and it's underneath this giant ornament chandelier that you almost have to see it to believe it. It's just really fascinating. And I believe they only open up this part of the brewery just during Christmas, so they do have a restaurant on site that you can eat at any time while you're visiting South Tyrol. But this Felsenkeller something really special.

Katy

I can see this whole itinerary of Christmas markets before me that's really great. Like you've mentioned, the Forst breweries near Merano, right? So the other ones, you would need a car to get around. Though wouldn't you? Or do they offer little tours to the markets?

Vin

They do have great public transportation, so you wouldn't necessarily need to rely on a car. When we go we always rent a car because we're just too curious. There's always something we want to dart off and go see that we didn't plan on. And driving over there is super easy. Sometimes you get in the mountains and if you're not a mountain driver, it can be a little nerve-wracking. But there's plenty of places to pull over, allow somebody else that's behind you to go around you. If someone's afraid of driving in that part of Italy, I wouldn't be. And I think to hit all the markets, I would recommend getting a car because the Bolzano and Merano market, they're about a half-hour apart. And then to go from Bolzano to Brixen, you're looking at about an hour drive. And then from Brixen to Sterzing, which is the smallest Christmas market, but really neat and romantic. It takes place underneath this iconic Tower of Twelve, it's called, and it's a clock tower dating to the 1400s. And it looks like it's from, I don't know, Lord of the Rings or Game of Thrones. So it's a really neat Christmas market, but that from Bolzano, would probably be an hour and a half drive. So you kind of want to break it up. So I would break it up between maybe spend half a day visiting Merano and Bozano and then splitting up the other time visiting Brixen and Sterzing. And then, of course, if you're there when the other boutique markets are going on, you'd want to fit those into if I were going to be visiting, just for Christmas markets, I would plan on a minimum of three days.

Katy

It sounds like you could easily spend a week there. I love a Christmas market.

Vin

Oh, you could spend a week there, for sure.

Kate

Yeah.

Vin

If you're going to tie it in with a ski trip, yeah, easily do a week.

Katy

And where do you guys normally fly into Milan or Venice?

Vin

Actually, Munich

Katy

Munich? Ah

Vin

We've flown into Milan and Venice before, so it kind of depends where we find the best airfare. But from an efficiency standpoint, we feel like, for us at least, Munich is always pretty reliable as far as being on time. And for us, able to get a rental car and then driving down from Munich, it's about, I want to say, three and a half hours. So it's not a fun trip to fly for us, 9 hours and then drive three and a half, but it's well worth it. You can also fly into Innsbruck, and you're only then an hour away from South Tyrol or Verona in the south. So then again, you're only an hour away.

Katy

You got me thinking now. I definitely want to head up there next year when we're there in September. And I'm thinking, Where should we fly into? Now you've got me thinking. Some of these tips are well worth listening to for anyone who's really interested in this region, because you automatically think like I did, just to go straight to Milan or Venice. But you can actually get some pretty good connections into some of these other small airports as well.

Vin

And actually, they started running Bolzano has its own airport. It's a small regional airport, but Sky Alps is an airline that flies directly into Bolzano. So you can depending on... I think it's

only certain parts of Europe that they service. But if you're visiting, say, France, for example, and you want to take part of your trip and visit South Tyrol, you can fly now to Bolzano.

Katy

I heard - I'm not a skiing expert, so don't quote me on this, but I heard that the Italian ski resorts are actually considerably better value than the ones in France and Switzerland. Is that your understanding?

Vin

We have heard that we're not skiers primarily because we grew up - I think the biggest hill takes about 30 seconds to ski down didn't fall in love with skiing at a young age. But it seems from our experience that pretty much all the hospitality in South Tyrol seems to be a really good value compared to other parts of Europe. And from our perspective, what you get with your hotel stay at any of the resorts, or even the mountain farm stays that we've been at, the amount of value you get for what you spend is way more than what we get back home. So the challenge, of course, is always getting to South Tyrol or Italy, because that can be expensive. But once you're there for what you spend - you just get so much and you can go stay at a five star place, a nice expensive resort where you can experience all the Alpine wellness amenities, saunas and pools, or you can stay in an Airbnb on a farm and there you're going to wake up next to cowbells and chickens.

Katy

There's something about those cowbells.

Vin

Yeah, we like falling asleep and waking up to them.

Katy

It's magical. I haven't had that experience in Italy, but I had it in Switzerland. And you just wake up and you've got a big smile on your face. You're like, oh.

Kate

Yeah.

Katy

Think of Heidi and all of that.

Vin

Yes, you do.

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Katy

We haven't even mentioned cheese. I'm sure there's some good cheese dishes that are happening at that time of year.

Kate

Yes, absolutely. Yeah. One of our favorite cheeses is a Stelvio cheese that you can get from Mila is the big dairy company out there. But yeah, there's always so many different cheeses that you can sample. They have them at the different booths within the markets, so it's a lot of fun to try the different cheeses.

Vin

And the unique thing about the cheese is that it's made with - I don't know if it's all the cheeses, but a lot of the cheeses are made with hay milk. So the cows there on the farms, they're eating hay, so they're producing what they call hay milk, which is definitely a different flavor than you get, at least from where we live, where most of the cows are eating corn. So it seems to be more of a - I don't know, I guess I would call it a richer milk. But that's also reflected in the cheeses.

Katy

Yeah, we can definitely taste what the cows have been eating (or the animals) been eating in the cheese. And I think that's when you start to understand things like that, then the appeal of a mass-produced cheese becomes very minimal because you're like what was used to cow eating? I don't know. We don't want to think about it, really, but yeah, I just think just being able to go to these markets just like such a fun experience. So all the stalls are like food or crafts and Glühwein, is that right?

Kate

Yes, pretty much, yeah.

Vin

You can also - they sell a lot of clothing items, too. And it's made from a wool that comes from Valdefunes, which is one of the most enchanting valleys in the Dolomites. It's probably one of the more iconic sites. If you've ever tried to describe it, you see the church with the giant peaks in the background in the green valley. That's Val di Funes and they have a lot of sheep farms there and so a lot of the wool comes out of there and you can go to the markets and it's actually great for shipping back because you can pick up socks and hats and gloves, which are very light for your luggage. It's very comfortable.

Katy

That lovely. That's a great souvenir. I love things like that because when you wear something like that, you're not only having something to keep your feet warm, but it's taking you back to another place and some memories of some good times that you had.

Vin

Absolutely. The only thing I was going to bring up as far as what you should try when you're at the market is you'll find some stands that are distilleries. So there's a lot of little distilleries throughout South Tyrol, where they make all sorts of grappa and schnapps, but the one that you have to try during the holiday season is mountain pine schnapps. I don't know exactly how they produce it, but it's like tasting the whole season in a shot. Really good. If you're cold, it's a great way to warm up.

Katy

Yeah, for sure. That sounds great. Oh, wow. I love all of this. And like I said, I really just would love to spend a Christmas in that area. I just think it would be so pretty and magical and, you know, not only that, it's you have all these different cultural experiences. I'm not sure I'll have to build myself up to the Krampus run, I think. But.

Vin

You'd love it.

Katy

Yeah, I would love it. I love any of these cultural things and it's one of those things that you're not going to experience anywhere else, is it?

Kate

Exactly. It's incredibly unique, even as you're being beaten.

Katy

Well, thank you, Kate and Vin, it's always such a pleasure to get to know this beautiful region with you and I'm sure our listeners can't wait to learn more. Can you let everyone know how they can stay in touch with you?

Vin

Yeah, our website is throneandvine.com and we're also on Instagram and Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter as well, so they can head to our website. In addition to a lot of articles about the region, we also have different trip ideas that we share. So if you're planning a trip to South

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Tyrol, if you're thinking about it, feel free to use our website as a resource and we're also available to answer questions.

Kate

Yes, and thank you so much for having us on again. We always look forward to this.

Katy

Yes, well, we love having you. And everyone - the throne and vine website is one of the best resources I know about Italy and this specific region. It's really hard sometimes to find really accurate and really fantastic information, but they have got it sorted out. And what I love about Katie and Vin is they all got very well connected in with the local people there. So it's not just the perspective of people that visit there often, but you've also got the perspective of locals, and I think that's really important too. So, Grazie Mille Kate and Vin it's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas now and I hope you have a lovely Christmas and one day, hopefully, you can meet in South Tyrol

Kate

Absolutely.

Vin

Absolutely.

Kate

Yes Merry Christmas. Thank you. Grazie Mille.

Katy

Oooh doesn't South Tyrol sound magical? I have to admit I think the combination of Italian flair and German efficiency is pretty enticing. And who wouldn't want to be wandering around a charming market glowing in pretty lights browsing the stalls for cheese and ornaments while sipping some gluhwein?

I don't mind telling you that visiting this region in winter is a Christmas dream of mine and I am so glad Kate and Vin shared all the wonderful details of the special traditions and places to go to experience them. You can find all of their suggestions in our detailed show notes at untolditaly.com/153 for episode 153.

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy over this year and years past. I hope you enjoyed today's show. I'm also making a big shout-out to Evan and Selena Reedman who are part of our Untold Italy Amori group. It's been such a joy to help them plan out their trip to Italy next year and I'm so excited for their family adventure across

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Italy. Thanks for your support Evan and Selena and to all our Untold Italy Amici and Espresso podcast supporters. We truly appreciate you all.

It's also a great time to acknowledge the support of the growing and truly amazing Untold Italy team who support this podcast, our Italy Travel Planning Facebook group, our website, and of course my wonderful friend Olivia who is helping to deliver incredible experiences for our guests on our Untold Italy Tours. Grazie team! You're all so wonderful and none of this would be possible without you. I personally get incredible support from my family too who put up with weird work hours and an obsession with all things Italian. Thank you family. You mean the world to me.

Before I sign off I want to Wish you all Buon Natale, Merry Christmas and happy holidays. Enjoy the time with your family and friends however you celebrate the holidays and, if you can, add a little Italian flair to your celebrations. We'll be making Torta Caprese as taught to us by Holly and Gianluca from Michelangelo Capri! So delicious.

That's all for today and for a couple of weeks as we have a little break in the lead-up to Christmas. We'll be back just before the new year with some fun episodes, an itinerary consultation, and more inspiration for your travels to Italy in 2023 and beyond. But until then it's "ciao for now".