

Untold Italy Episode 156 - Experiences to try in Piedmont

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 156.

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

Hello, ciao everyone, welcome to another episode of Italian adventures and stories to inspire your travels. Now listeners, I'm not sure if you know but I'm on a mission to share with you all the incredible things you can do in the regions of Italy that you might not know so much about. These are the places that the popular guidebooks miss - and we're not sure why - but they are the places where you'll find experiences that will stay in your heart forever.

In this episode we're returning to the beautiful northern region of Piedmont in the foothills of the Alps where the people cherish exceptional food experiences and some of the world's greatest wines. It was in Piedmont that the Italian royal family had their roots and where the unification of the diverse principalities on the Italian peninsular was forged. Piedmont is a region of intellectuals, palaces, castles and industry but above all food and wine.

Our good friend and Piedmont guide Carlotta Muti from Torino Discovery is joining us again today. She has an enormous passion for her region, its history, and culture. We heard from her last year on [episode 134](#) about the palaces and castles of Turin and we're thrilled to partner with her on our tours of Piedmont. She's so much fun so let's get started and welcome her back onto the show!

Katy

Bentornata Carlotta. Ciao. And welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast.

Carlotta

Ciao, Katie. Thanks for having me today.

Katy

Oh, it's so great to see you again and see a big smiley face. It's wonderful. How have you been? And what's happening in beautiful Piemonte these days?

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Carlotta

Everything has been fine here. We are preparing for Christmas and even the weather is preparing for Christmas. It was snow last week and probably is about to snow today. So wonderful, wonderful winter day that we are blessed with.

Katy

So good. I love it here. For everyone listening, we're recording this just before Christmas. So it's always great to have a winter wonderland, especially for those of us who are in the southern hemisphere and not in a snowy environment where summer is usually quite warm. Not so much this year, but I think for all of us, we find it very exciting that you have snow and it's really cool. Now, Carla, you've been on our show before, but what I'd like you to do is introduce yourself to our listeners and let them all know about you and what you do, just in case they hadn't met you before.

Carlotta

Sure, Katy. So my name is Carlotta. I was born and raised here in Torino in northwest Italy, and I am a tour guide here in Torino and in Piedmont. So my aim is always to make everyone have a wonderful experience while visiting our area here. I have a small company called Torino Discovery. So if you want to know a little bit more about the tours that we offer and the things that you can do that we can do together, you can go on www.torinodiscovery.com And there you will find any information about that. And thanks again for having me today.

Katy

No worries at all. So the reason why we got Carlotta back, apart from the fact that she's, like, so fun and as always, great to talk to, but it's really important to me that people understand just how diverse Italy is and just how beautiful it is from top to toe and where Carlotta is from in Piemonte is a really, really beautiful region. And, yeah, it's really not very visited by English-speaking tourists. So let's go through exactly where Piemonte is so everyone knows.

Carlotta

Sure. Piemonte is in northern Italy. It's northwest of Italy. In fact, it actually is on the border with France. So, for example, from Torino, which is the capital of the region, you could get to France in just over an hour in the mountains. And if you travel eastbound, you can reach Milan in an hour and a half to 2 hours if you decide to move by train - if you take the high speed train, it's a very short ride from Torino to Milan, it's 45 minutes only to get here from Milan. So very, very close.

Katy

I think people just don't realize - it's a beautiful little pocket. And what is really magical about Piemonte and Turin? And what I was trying to explain to Carlotta earlier, before we started recording, was in the background of Torino, you can see the Alps in the background. And then, you know, it's a very beautiful chocolate box scene that you don't really get in many other places in Italy. You know, it's not maybe what you traditionally expect about Italy, but Carlotta is telling me about Mont Blanc, or as they call it in Italian, Montebianco, and half of it's in Italy. And I didn't well, it hadn't really occurred to me. I hadn't really thought about it too much. But it's really close by, isn't it?

Carlotta

It is. It is close by. And even the name of our region, Piemonte - Piemonte, comes from it's a compound name that encloses *piedi* - which means feet, *monte* - which means mountains. That means that Piemonte, the region, is surrounded by mountains, and the mountains in question are the Alps, the Italian Alps. And the highest peak of the Italian Alps is the Mont Blanc/Monte Bianco. It's only a couple of hours drive from Torino.

Katy

Monte Bianco, or Mont Blanc, is one of the most famous peaks in Europe, and it's very beautiful. I have seen it from the French side, and now you've given me the challenge, I have to go and see it from the Italian side. I guess in Piemonte you have this mountainous region that obviously offers a lot of winter sports, etcetera, and people come from all over Europe to go skiing in the area as well. So I think what Piemonte offers is just like a massive variety of things to do. Now, this year, though, it's been really busy for you, hasn't it in Turin and Piemonte? It's been crazy busy because they've had a few special events happening this year, like the Eurovision Song Contest. They've had people flocking there, all from all over Europe, really, to come and take part in all that, which is so much fun. But Piemonte is known for lots of things, and what we thought we'd do today is go through some of the experiences that you can have in Piemonte, so you know what to expect if you if you're interested in visiting the region. And let me tell you, it's a very beautiful region. It's got one of my favorite places in Italy in the region, so we'll probably touch on that in a minute. But so, Carla, what is one of the most popular things to do when we visit Piemonte?

Carlotta

Well, Piemonte Katy is a very diverse region. There is much in terms of offering, in terms of cultural offering in gastronomy, as well as nature offering. So really you could spend easily ten days in Piedmont doing a lot of different activities, a lot of things from different realms. So I would start talking about the end of gastronomy, since we are very strong on that point in Piedmont. Piedmont is the land of truffle and wines, starting with truffles. Piedmont is the homeland of the white truffle of Alba. White truffle is a special kind of this subterranean mushroom that has a very, very potent earthy smell. It's like eating the woods. It's a kind of truffle. It's a variety that you cannot farm. It's a wide variety, so there is no way you can farm it. It grows under the roots of some particular trees, so not under every tree. Some of the

trees are, for example, chestnuts, oaks and hazelnuts, and we are very rich in hazelnuts here in Piedmont. Piedmont is the land where Nutella was invented.

Carlotta

So truffle hunting is one of the experiences that you can do. While in Piedmont there are several professional, certified truffle hunters with their lovely dogs of many different breeds. They are generally younger dogs, very active and very eager to find those truffles because they get educated and trained by their hunters since they are very, very small puppies. Imagine that the dogs, they get the first experience of the truffles already when they are breastfeeding, because the truffle oil gets put on the mum's breasts while the puppies are feeding. So they start to get into the habit of smelling truffles and they know the smell from a very, very young age. And then the training continues, of course. So while they grow as puppies, they start to smell and even taste the truffles. The first part of the training, you have the dogs actually eating the truffles as a treat, as a very expensive treat. Eventually, the hardest part of the training is actually getting them not to eat the truffle, but eating another kind of treat. That is a very difficult moment in training. But of course, they eventually succeed and you can actually go on a walk with a truffle hunter and with his or her truffle dog to actually hunt for them. The white truffles are hunted only during a very special time in the year, between October and December on average.

Carlotta

But even if you visit Piedmont in May, you are able to go truffle hunting. You're not going to hunt for the whites, but you're going to hunt for the black truffles, which are another variety, always very earthy smell, very nice, a bit less potent than the whites, but still a delicious truffle and even much more affordable than the white. And basically, you go on this walk through the woods, through the hazelnut fields with the truffle hunter. You see how the truffle hunter and the dog interacts together, because there is a lot of interaction between them. And it's so exciting when the dog eventually smells the presence of a truffle, because the dog goes crazy. They start to dig very fast, and you have to be careful not to stand behind the dog, otherwise you're going to be covered in soil that the dog throws away while living. And then eventually the moment when the truffle is taken out and taken away from the roots of the tree comes and the dog eventually gets another treat. And then you will be able to actually see the truffle.

Carlotta

Sometimes they're a bit small, depends on the year. Other times they can be very big. I mean, they can be even half a kilogram, even up to a kilogram sometimes a very, very big truffle, like as big as a human head. Of course, it's quite rare to find truffles of that size, but it's actually possible. Those ones are generally the ones who eventually get sold during the truffle fair in Alba, which takes place yearly between October and the end of November.

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Katy

I heard this year that the price of the white truffle was really expensive. How much was it this year per kilo? Can you remember?

Carlotta

This year was extremely expensive. It went from 5 to €600 per 100 grams. If you imagine that for a single portion, you eat between 10 to 15 grams, that totals up to 50 to €80 per dish that you taste. I'm talking about the white truffle. Of course, the black truffle is way less expensive than that. Way more affordable. It goes generally about around 50/€60 per 100 grams. So one 10th of the price of the white. White was very expensive during the auction that took place this year. And generally market, depending on the weather. If it's a very humid year where we had a very humid autumn, then truffle prices are lower. But this wasn't the case this year. We have been experiencing a big drought during the year and during the start of autumn, so there weren't that many white truffles, to be honest. And so the price went very high.

Katy

Yeah. So interesting. And what I love about this, what is it? It's a fungus, really, is that you can't farm it, so there's no way you can go in and dump a whole lot of fertilizer in the ground. It's just completely up to nature. And the relationship between the truffle hunter and the dogs and the nature and all of that. I just think it's a really beautiful thing that it's one of those things you can't recreate anywhere, really. So it's one of those very special experiences that you can have when you're in Piemonte. And obviously, once you've been on the truffle hunt and hopefully you find something, then you can eat it.

Carlotta

Definitely, you want to eat the product of your search. In the Langhe area, there is even a university for truffle dogs. There is a university course for the dogs where the dogs get actually trained and they get graduation after, of course, the exam. The exam is being able to find truffles without eating them, without scratching them with the paw, because sometimes the truffles, they can get scratched if the dog is too excited. And that, of course, lowers eventually the price, the sale price of the truffle, because there is a mark. So it's important that they do that faster, but also in a delicate way. And they can be taught to do that in the University of the Truffle dogs.

Katy

I love it. Well, everyone listening. We have just have a new member of our family who is a puppy, so I've now got some great ideas for our dog. The Truffle University sounds like a great idea. Oh, my goodness. And so that is not in the capital, Turin, but that's in La Langhe region. Whereabouts is that? Just explain to everyone where that is Carlotta

Carlotta

The Langhe region is in the heart of the Piedmont region. It's a hilly area, southern further than Turin. Turin is more or less halfway through the length of Piedmont. And the Langhe hills are a very special area in terms of climate and in terms of soil as well. So the nature there is one of a kind. You can't recreate it in any other part of the world, not even in any other part of the region. And there is a river called the Tanaro River, which flows and below southern, then the Tanaro River is where you have the Langhe area. Langhe in the local dialect means a stretch of land, and there are different stretches of this land that are marked with wine names because Langhe is not only the land of truffles, but it's also the land of the great wines of Piedmont.

Katy

And there are so many great wines there and celebrated throughout the world. So tell us about the wines, because we're all wine lovers here, I think.

Carlotta

Yes, wine lover here as well. Of course. In the Langhe area, they produce many different kinds of wines. Many of them, they are produced with an indigenous grape, which is the Nebbiolo grape. With the Nebbiolo grape, you can make different kinds of wines. The best of them is the super-renowned Barolo wine. Barolo wine is a strong, structured red wine that can age virtually endlessly. You can age it for a decade, two decades, five decades even, if you store it correctly. You can really taste it whenever during your lifespan. And it can be produced only in 11 little municipalities inside the Langhe area. So not even in the whole area of the Langhe, but just eleven small towns, small villages, I shall say. There is a very strict document with rules, with very strict rules to produce the bottle of wine. So you have to abide to those rules very, very well. It cannot be produced outside these eleven little villages. And by the way, those villages are very, very nice. Villages perched on top of the hills of the Langhe area with medieval castles and towers. And really, it's a very, very charming and fascinating area to be in because you can do a little bit of cultural tourism.

Carlotta

You can do hikes in the hills. You can go wine tasting, really. There is something for every taste. And the Langhe, they have a very special kind of soil that is perfect for growing the Nebbiolo grapes. It's a chalky, clay, sometimes even sandy limestone soil that takes the flavors, the best flavors of the Nebbiolo grapes to a whole new level. There are other wines produced with Nebbiolo grapes in other areas of Italy, but they don't turn out as rich and complex as the wines from Piedmont, much like the Barolo. The Barolo is also nicknamed the king of wines and the Wine of Kings. So you can imagine how good that tastes. A very rich, rich, structured flavor.

Katy

And is it easy to go wine tasting there? Because I think we talk about this a little bit, because in some of the new countries and new winemaking countries like the United States and Australia, what tends to happen is you get in a car and you can zip around five or six wineries in a day. But it's a little bit different in Piemonte isn't it? You need to probably make an appointment to go visit a winery, perhaps.

Carlotta

Well, it's better to make an appointment. Generally, producers, they have different times in the day, certain times for tours, so you can do a tour of the winery. The vast majority of them, they have now digitalized, so they have an online system. You can just get on their website, book your time slot, and book also the kind of experience that you like, because there are different tours and different tastings that you can do. And then you just show up at the start. In time, they're going to welcome you and you start the tour with them. So it's becoming easier than the past to actually go when tasting. And in some cases, you can even just pop in. But of course, it depends on the producer. What you can always do, of course, is pop in to actually buy the wine, because those wineries they have generally the shop where they sell the wines they produce on their land, and generally they are open, surely on weekdays and Saturdays as well. And most of them also on Sundays, they are getting less strict because Piemonte is people we are considered very hard workers, but sometimes not very open-minded. But things are changing. Things are changing even through the hills of Langhe.

Katy

Is there maybe some of the most popular producers that people might want to look up if they were going into the area?

Carlotta

Well, there are producers for any taste because there are big producers, but also small ones in terms of big historical producers, where you can also see some of the historical barrels. You have Fontanafredda, which is a 20 minutes drive from Alba, very easy drive. And then in the small village of Barolo, because Barolo is the name of the wine, but is also the name of one of the eleven municipalities, one of the eleven villages. And at the entrance of Barolo, there is a big wine producer called Marquesa de Barolo. And this is another historical wine producer. But there are also smaller ones. For example, in the area not far from Barolo, there is a wine producer that I really, really like. The name is Cascina Sot S.O.T, and it's a smaller producer, but the wines that they make are really, really good. And when you go for a wine tasting, if you book the wine tasting there, they generally give you also a little bit of food tastings. So a little bit of few nibbles, a little bit of salami cheese, gristini, those breadsticks that are typical of Piedmont and hazelnuts as well, because hazelnuts pair quite well with Barola wine.

Katy

Hazelnuts and wine. There you go. Interesting. So, wine tasting, truffle hunting. Sounds pretty good to me. Pretty towns. And I'm sure you can buy the wine in the towns too, right? I think they've got little cantinas.

Carlotta

Sure. In the towns you have a lot of wine shops that gather different labels from different producers so you can make comparisons. Sometimes they carry one specific year that is really good. So if you go around not only to the wine producers, but also while you visit the villages, you are going to encounter many wine shops with great, great selections where you can purchase wine. They generally ship them also overseas. So wherever you live in the world, you are going to be able to get all the wine right at your doorstep.

Katy

It's so exciting, I think when you come home from a trip and then a few weeks later your wine arrives and you're like, hooray, I've got my present that I shipped from Italy. I think it's so much fun having that. And then you can make some delicious food. But maybe you can't bring the truffle because the truffle doesn't travel very well and it has to be eaten very fresh, doesn't it?

Carlotta

The truffle has to be eaten very fresh. You can actually keep it and store it for, I would say a week, maximum ten days. But you have to store it in a certain way. Some people say put it in rice. I don't suggest it because if rice actually absorbs the moisture of the truffle, so you're going to end up with a less fragrant product. I suggest to wrap it in paper towel and close it into a glass jar and then stock it in the fridge so you can keep it for up to, I would say a week to be on the safe side, to maintain all of the flavors and the perfumes of the truffle.

Katy

What do we actually do with the truffle, you don't just take a big bite of it. What do you do? How do people eat the truffle if you want it there?

Carlotta

You want to shave it on your dishes. Well, some of my favorite pairings are with eggs. For example, you can make fried eggs with a very runny yolk. And then you can grate/you can shave the truffle on top very thin chips of truffles. Or also on pasta. The typical pasta of Piedmont is the Tajarin. This is called Tajarin. They are a kind of tagliatelle, so long noodles, but they are cut much thinner than tagliatelle, something in between tagliatelle and the spaghetti. But it's fresh egg pasta. And if you cook that and you put a little bit of brown

butter, little bit toasted butter on top of the pasta, and then just a little bit of Parmesan cheese, and then you shave the truffle on, that brings out all of the flavors of the truffle. One of my absolute favorite truffle dishes.

Katy

It sounds delicious. I'm hungry now. Who wouldn't love to have that out? If it's really cold in the Alps, especially in winter, I expect it's a really good winter dish, but I can imagine I wouldn't argue eating it all year round, but sounds delicious.

Carlotta

Yes, you can actually eat it all year round in terms of the black truffles, you can have it all year round. And trust me, even when it's very warm, having a nice dish of Tajarin with truffle is perfect in any season.

Katy

Okay. I'm convinced I'll have it any time. So the area sounds very beautiful, and I can imagine it looks very different throughout the seasons. In La Langhe, what does it look like, say, in Spring compared to Autumn?

Carlotta

Well, the land looks very different in every season because the land is full of vines. So the vine has a special seasonality. If you go there in wintertime, you're going to see the hills sprinkled with some snow. The vines are cut down. They are pruned because they get pruned every year. But then if you start to go in end of March, beginning of April, you can see the little buds of the vines starting to spring. And then eventually, if you go there already in mid May to the end of May, beginning of June, the plants have developed quite a lot, so you can see a lot of greenery. And then eventually after the summertime, when the grapes are actually growing, you get to September and you get to the harvesting time. So if you travel in September, it is very likely that you are going to see people actually harvesting those grapes by hand. Because in order to harvest the grapes for the wine, you have to have trained staff who knows how to cut and how to select the grapes that need to be pressed to make the must and the juice for the wine.

Carlotta

And so it has to be done by hand also because the steepness of those hills doesn't allow machines to operate on them. So it's a very, very, you know, traditional thing, harvesting the grapes here. And then eventually, if you come in autumn, during October and November, those leaves, they turn yellow, they turn red. So depending on the kind of grapes, they turn different colors. And the panoramas are wonderful, really wonderful. The foliage is fantastic. And then the season starts again. So from December, you have that little bit of sprinkle of

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snow, maybe, depending on the years, and then starts again in the new year. So every season has a different look and they are all worth being seen.

Katy

Absolutely. And I think you made a really good point, is that I think when people think, oh, wow, Italy has got so many vines, but the terrain is very different. So in Piemonte, like you were saying, it's very steep, whereas in Tuscany, maybe the hills are a bit softer and they have different techniques for harvesting. But in Piemonte, the hills are very, quite dramatic, aren't they? And the vines hug the hills. So, like you mentioned, they have to do different techniques to get the grapes from the vines.

Carlotta

Yes, and talking about steep hills, that is the reason why the E-bikes, the electric bikes touring, has become a thing here in Piedmont because imagine going with a mountain bike that is non-electric on those very steep hills. Not very easy, not for everyone. But with the E-bikes, everyone can do even the steepest of the hills. You can go through the vineyards, even, and it's not extremely difficult because the Ebike helps to actually climb those without that much of an effort.

Katy

I confess. I have an E-bike and I love it. It's really good. I make the kids going on their normal bikes and put my electric on. It's really good. But I can imagine, especially on those very steep hills, it's really worthwhile. Amazing. And is there anything really special that you can do in the region to actually get a really good view of the terrain?

Carlotta

Sure, there are different peaks, even in the Langhe hills. So if you are talking about the hills of the Langhe, the two highest peaks are La Morra and Diano D'Alba. And from those you can have a bird's eye view, 360 degrees view from top down on the hills. But even from one of the beautiful castles of the region, I'm referring to the Grinzane Cavour castle. It's immersed in the vineyards and it's not as high as Diano or as La Morra, but there is a blessing in disguise, I would say, because you are immersed 360 degrees in vineyards. You can see the castles of the other villages perched on top of each and every hill that surrounds you. So the view is just so immersive. It's just amazing. And the castle itself is a big attraction because it's a Medieval castle that has been restored during the 18 hundreds and also in the 60s, in the past century. And it houses the Lange Museum and the Wine Museum. So you can visit the castle from the inside, you can see the medieval structure, you can have a lot of information regarding the wine production. And since the castle is on top of a small hill, the hill is all covered in vineyards and you can actually walk through those vineyards. There are some paths and on those paths you have panels that describe all the seasonality, all the things that needs to be

done in every season to farm the grapes. So it's a really interesting place with this breathtaking view.

Katy

This castle looks like it's straight out of a fairytale. Like I can sort of see Sleeping Beauty or something there. It's such a beautiful castle. But Piemonte is very well known for castle. In fact, probably one of the best regions if you're someone who likes castles and palaces because it was the royal region, it was the first capital of Italy and so there's plenty of beautiful properties to go visit, isn't there?

Carlotta

True, Katy. That's so true. Not many people know that, but Torino was the first capital of united Italy. Italy united only in 1861 as a whole country. So we are fairly a young country and the first capital was Torino. Torino was chosen as the capital because in Torino there was the family who actually united Italy under their crown. And I'm referring to the Savoy family. The Savoy family is one of the longest-living dynasties in Europe. We are talking about a millennium-long history of the family and they ruled over the area of Piemonte from the 1500s consistently up until the unification of Italy and then they eventually ruled over the whole country. And so during those centuries, they had plenty of time to build lovely palaces and castles. And the best of them, well, some of them are medieval and they were reused by the Savoy family and the ones that they built from scratch, they boast a wonderful baroque architecture, so rich, so ornate, golden reliefs, statues with those clothes that seem to fly through the wind. It's a very ornate style and the reason why they chose that style was legitimating their power through the architecture.

Carlotta

I always say that the Savoy family had a little bit of an inferiority complex, historically. They were regarded as at first a small Duchy and then eventually as a small kingdom compared to other more famous dynasties in Italy and Europe. So they wanted to make up for this inferiority complex through the wonderful architecture and so they really worked hard on that aspect. And the castles and palaces here really leave you breathless, especially because they are not so well known. So people don't expect such a richness, such a grander, a grand style to be here, but they are really worth visiting. And there are some palaces in Torino within the borders of the city of Torino, the capital of Piedmont. But the Savoy family loved the countryside as well. So there are other ones through the countryside, scattered through the countryside, and they have been awarded as a UNESCO heritage site, all of them, and they are called the Crown of the Delights.

Katy

What's your favorite?

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Carlotta

Well, my favorite is called Stupidigi. Stupidigi is a hunting lodge, a late Baroque and Rococo hunting lodge located just outside in the outskirts of Torino, where hunting lodge gives an idea of something rustic, which is definitely not the case in Stupinigi. It's a wonderful elegant Baroque building with different wings because it has sort of a star shape. And those branches that start from the center, they all unite in this wonderful Baroque double height hall that was used for marriages, for parties and for special events of the Savoy family. To give you an idea of how beautiful that palace is, I'll just tell you that Napoleon, when he conquered Italy at the very beginning of the 1800s, chose Stupinigi as the only place worth, out of all of the other ones, which are again equally beautiful, in my opinion. But he chose that one as a place for his stay during his stay here in Torino, and even as the stay for his sister, Pauline Borghese.

Katy

He was quite as discerning. You could argue that he did make some improvements in Italy, but I'm glad that he kept Stupinigi intact because it's a very beautiful place and I think it's just one of many palaces and castles you can visit. And we actually had a full episode on this with Carlotta. It's episode number 134, if anyone's really interested in that. But I don't understand, like, it doesn't get any more Instagram noise because really, this is the place where people can go with their red dress and twirl and get some incredible photos. It's just absolutely stunning Stupinigi. But I think it's best that we - maybe we don't tell them we can go there and enjoy it for ourselves. Now. What about Turin itself? Because it's got some amazing architecture there, too.

Carlotta

Yes, Torino or Turin, as you want to call it, in the Italian version or the English version. But Torino is fairly a big city because it's the fourth most populated city in Italy and we are just a bit below 1 million, about 900,000 population within the city borders. And it was the first capital of united Italy. It boasts a wonderful architecture. Some people gave the nickname Little Paris to the city because of the elegant architecture. It has about 18 arches, so you can walk in a covered path. Doesn't matter whether it's wintertime or summertime. So if it's in the pouring rain or in the scorching sun, you are sheltered by the arches. So that makes it a very enjoyable city. And there are quite a few castles actually located in the city. Palaces, I shall say the most famous one is the Royal Palace. It's located within the very, very center of the city. And outside the architecture might look a bit imposing and serious because it was the center of their power. It was like a headquarters of the small family. But as soon as you enter inside, you will be amazed by the ornate architecture, the richness in detail, these red and gold and the Chinese Hall. And then there is even the Royal Armory, which looks like a Harry Potter hall with the knights on the horses, with all the armors and those armors and weapons. They are not even armor and weapons anymore, but they become like pieces of jewelry because they are so detailed and so precious that even people that maybe are not

very interested in these kinds of items, they are astonished by the looks of those, the detailing in those.

Carlotta

But Torino is not only about palaces, but even gastronomy. Here is a very strong point. Torino is very famous for chocolate making. Chocolate lover here. I don't know about you, Katy.

Katy

Yeah, me too. Absolutely. I love it.

Carlotta

The chocolate is produced in Torino. There are two kinds. Mainly we are very big on dark chocolate and on the very special gianduja chocolate. Gianduja chocolate is a mixture of chocolate and hazelnut paste. So it's a very rich and velvety kind of feeling that you get in your mouth when you eat it. And there is a special kind of chocolate with the gianduja and that is called gianduiotto. Gianduiotto is a small chocolate wrapped into this golden foil. It has the shape of a reversed boat and it's almost like a little gianduja chocolate ingot. And it's a delicious kind of chocolate because it really melts in your mouth. As soon as it touches your tongue in your mouth, it starts to melt. So it's like an explosion of chocolate and hazelnuts and it's the typical historical chocolate of Torino.

Katy

You know what I did this week? I went and actually there's an Italian shop and I actually bought myself some Gianduiotto and I loved it. So much like I don't know how many are left, but my husband and I were eating it and he said I don't know if this is the best description, but it's kind of like a very refined and more delicious version. It's just like a solid block of Nutella, but much more rich and delicious. So if you can imagine if Nutella was like hard, but it was like the most decadent chocolate you could have - that's what it's like and it's delicious. So I did buy them for Christmas, but unfortunately, I don't think they're going to make it.

Carlotta

Yes, I do the same. I go and buy big quantities and I say, okay, I'm going to give those gifts for Christmas. And then eventually we eat them all in the house. They are one after the other. You really have to make a big effort to stop eating them. Because they're so good. The balancing between the acidity of the chocolate, the richness and the fatness of the hazelnut paste and the right amount of sugar that is not too overpowering makes the consistency and the taste so good that it's so balanced that you really want to eat more and more. You never have enough.

Katy

No, you can never have enough. It's very true. But you don't just put it in little chocolates, do you? You can go everywhere and have chocolate in Torino and this is one of my favorite. I haven't actually tried this and I really need to try it. This drink, a special drink.

Carlotta

Yes, the special drink of Torino is called Bicerin. Bicerin means in the local dialect, little glass. Little glass filled with a secret recipe of a mixture of hot chocolate. And when I say hot chocolate, I mean the Torino version of our chocolate which is a very rich and decadent dark hot chocolate. So don't imagine a milky liquidy beverage but imagine something that is almost the consistency of a pudding. So you put that and then you put espresso coffee inside and then you top it with a layer of semi half whipped cream which is not completely solid but not liquidy, something in between. And the typical way to drink it is in layers. So you don't want to mix it because you want to taste all of the consistencies and even the temperatures because they are served at three different temperatures in the glass. And by drinking it in layers you can really taste all of them separately. And it's the go-to drink on a Sunday morning after you went out of church after mass. You want to hit one of the historic cafes of Torino and you want to ask for a bicerin and then you are going to be delighted.

Katy

Well, I mean, I think that's just a whole experience in itself because these cafes are absolutely gorgeous. They look like they've stepped out of as you say, I think they look almost Parisian, don't they? And they have that sort of intellectual cafe kind of vibe where you can picture people sort of scheming away probably. How are they going to get Italy unified? They really were there for the intellectuals were having those conversations in those cafes and drinking their Bicerin. So it's a really special thing to do when you're in Turin, I think. Yeah, amazing. So I mean, Turin has got you know, if you're talking about experiences, you can do museums, you can even go - one of the most important Christian relics in the world is in Turin with the shroud. You can keep yourself very busy there.

Carlotta

True Katy, and you made a very interesting point about the historic cafes, because we always say that the history of united Italy wasn't done in the palaces, in the big political halls, but it was done in the historic cafe because that's the place where the intellectuals actually met and where the politicians actually made the deals in front of a nice hot glass of Bicerin beverage or a nice glass of Barolo wine as well. And they are really rich in terms of decorations. The oldest ones, they date back to the 17 hundreds. But then we have some that were opened in the 18 and even early 19 hundreds. And we are the Torinese people, the locals here, we are very traditional, so we really like to actually go in one of those historic cafes. And I'm not talking only about one, but we have several, like, 5/10 different cafes scattered around the city center where, with those marble counters, wood paneling mirrors,

chandeliers, crystal chandeliers, the waiting staff all with the uniform, with the bow tie, and all in black and white uniform. So this is a big tradition for us here in Torino. And as you said, not only you can go for chocolate and be sure you're in tasting in the city.

Carlotta

But really you can keep yourself rather busy, I shall say, with palaces, with museums. We have the most important Egyptian museum in the world, outside Egypt. The collection boasts over 30,000 pieces inside and it's been reset with a new layout in 2015. So it's a very enjoyable museum, even though the topic is quite intense because we are talking about ancient Egypt and archaeology. So it's an intense topic, but it's delivered really nicely, even if you go on your own. So it's absolutely worth seeing. And you mentioned also the spiritual aspect of Torino, because Torino is the home of the Holy Shroud of Turin. The Holy Shroud supposedly is the linen, the piece of fabric that wrapped the body of Jesus Christ after his death and before his resurrection. And the very, very peculiar thing about this relic is that the linen itself carries the image of a man. That is a very historically accurate image. So there are the stigma, there are the signs of the crown of thorns, there are the signs of the whippings. And so still to this day, people experts in shroud studies are debating whether the shroud was the real fabric that wrapped the body of Jesus Christ or if it was an artifact, you know, made in the, in the Middle Ages. And to this question, probably we will never have an answer. But still, having seeing it live, it's quite an experience. I just want to make a quick information here because the shroud is not always on display. It gets put on display only on very special occasions, automatically on Jubilee years, so once every 25 years, and the next display will be in 2025, plus some special occasions decided by the Pope. So don't expect to be able to see the shroud for sure when you come to Torino, you can for sure see where it's kept. It's kept in the cathedral nowadays, but there is also a replica available, a real size replica on fabric that can be seen. That is just exactly the real shroud that is kept from being seen for most of the time.

Katy

Yeah. I mean, imagine it's a very delicate item. Now, look, it's so interesting, and we haven't even really touched on my favorite place, which is Lago di Orta which is one of my favorite places in all of Italy. It's one of the beautiful lakes to the east, closer to Milan, actually. And the reason I love it is because it's kind of a little bit mysterious. You've got this gorgeous lake and hills and mountains in the background, and then you've got this little island in the middle right there with a monastery on it. And the nuns that live there now, they've taken a vow of silence. So if you go over there on the little ferry, you need to zip it up and to be respectful to them. But even if you don't go there, it looks so pretty. It's just a beautiful little town there. It's really fascinating. I love it.

Carlotta

I love Orta too. It's such a nice lake. Not as big as the Lake Maggiore, which is not far from Lake Orta. Actually, Lake Maggiore is where Como is. Como, actually, is on the other side, on

the Milan side of the lake because the lake is half Lombardi, so the region of Milan and half Piedmont, the region of Turin. But the lake, the Lake Orta, is completely in Piedmont, and it's surrounded by hills, and it's not far from the mountains. There are wonderful villas right on the bank of the lake. And in Orta, there is also the only three Michelin star restaurant in Piedmont - that is run by and owned by the chef Cannavacciuolo. He's a star chef here in Italy, is one of the judges of the Italian version of MasterChef, and he has this 3 Michelin star restaurant in this complex that is called Villa Crespi, a very, very ornate, particular villa that is almost by the lake. So it is really a place worth seeing, even Lake Orta. I agree with you, Katy.

Katy

It's just really pretty, and it's not very busy compared to the other big lakes. And you just get to the really nice feeling. You walk through the town if you park in the car park and you walk through the town, and you end up in their little piazza that faces the island, and it's just a little bit breathtaking. It's kind of a bit unexpected in a very charming, quiet kind of way, and I really like it. I think that really sums up what Piemonte is all about. It's like layers of things to uncover. You can experience the nature, you can experience the culture and the wine and the food. But I think when it all comes together in these layers of experiences and that's when you're really going to feel the magic is that it might not hit you with a bam like the Duomo in Florence or in Milan or the Colosseum. But you've got these layers and layers of beauty and really strong attention to detail in the food, in the architecture and the culture. And I just think it baffles me why more people don't go there. It's quite easy to get to, so hopefully, we helped convince them. What do you think Carlotta?

Carlotta

I hope so. And you made a very good point when you talked about the essence of Piedmont because sometimes I think as an international traveler, when you think about coming to Italy, you think about all those beautiful things that you can see in the main spots, the main hot spots. But also you start to think about the crowds that are going to be there, and you know that you're going to have to line for everything, even for going for a brief second to a toilet. And that is not the case in Piedmont. So if you still want to see lovely Italian art history, landscapes and nature without being constantly within crowds, I think Piemonte is a great choice.

Katy

Yeah, I think it's beautiful. Carlotta, how can people stay in touch with you and learn more about Piemonte?

Carlotta

People can stay in touch with me either by going on the website www.torinodiscovery.com or you can send an email at info@torinodiscovery.com if you want to organize a particular

itinerary. We do personalized itineraries, private tours, or you can even follow us on Instagram - we publish pictures and we give information about Piedmont. The name of the Instagram page is torinodiscovery - same name as the Facebook page as well.

Katy

Yes, definitely do that. And so we always collaborate with Carlotta on our tours as well. So if you come and join us on one of our Untold Italy tours, you'll definitely get to meet Carlotta and her team. And I can just tell you that it's just a beautiful experience and hopefully we'll all see you in Piemonte very soon. So Grazie Mille Carlotta, thank you so much for joining me again. And I can't stop talking about Piemonte. It's just such a beautiful region and I hope to chat with you again soon.

Carlotta

Thank you very much, Katy, for having me. It's been a pleasure. And for everyone, come to Piedmont, come to Torino, come to Langhe. We are very happy to welcome you here. Thank you very much.

Katy

Grazie Mille. Thank you.

Katy

I'm so excited to be heading back to Piedmont in a few months time. As I mentioned, This gorgeous region is home to one of my favourite places in Italy, probably the world - Lago di Orta and I have to confess that my husband's aunty, who is from Torino, is very cross we haven't visited lately so I'm fulfilling a promise to her. But, as you've heard, it's no tough promise to keep when you think of the bicerin coffee and chocolate drink, royal palaces, truffle pasta and beautiful scenery you can find in Piedmont. And it's all just a short train ride from Milan.

If you're intrigued to learn more about Piedmont we've put all the details of the places Carlotta mentioned into the episode show notes at untolditaly.com/156 as well as a link to her company Torino Discovery and our brand new Piedmont guide with lots of helpful information to assist you in planning your trip.

Now if you're the type of person who'd like to explore this stunning region in the way I do, with a bilingual host and expert local guides who share not only the best restaurants to eat at and wineries to visit but also the dishes to try, then we have tours of Piedmont departing in both Spring and Fall this year where you can enjoy many of the experiences Carolotta mentioned and many more. Our guests in October last year had an amazing time and I just loved the comment from Pati who said *We have been to Italy several times, but never like this! She and her husband were thrilled to go deep into the culture, learn how to cook local dishes and go on a truffle hunt.*

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We have a few spots left on our 2023 trips if you'd like to join us - the link to the itinerary is in the show notes also.

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That's all for today, stay tuned for more Italy travel stories and surprises next week, but until then it's... "ciao for now".