

Untold Italy Episode 175 - Expert answers to FAQ about travel in Italy

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 175.

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, how are you going with your Italy trip planning? I know that while some of you delve right in and devour all the information you can get your hands on while others find it all a bit overwhelming. I tend to swing between those two scenarios when I'm travel planning but usually, there are a few core questions that come up again and again. And we certainly see this in our Italy Travel Planning community on Facebook.

As an aside If you're not a member there yet it's free to join and it's where we encourage people to share their trip experiences and help travelers have a wonderful time in Italy.

Recently I was joined in the group live with my friend Daniell Oteri from Feast Travel where we answered some of the burning questions travelers have about visiting Italy like should you travel by train or rent a car and whether hotel or Airbnbs are better accommodation options. Today's podcast episode is a replay of that live session. I hope you enjoy it!

Katy

Ciao buongiorno, buona sera. I don't know where you are in the world, but hello, welcome. I'm Katy, I am the host of the Italy Travel Planning Group. I am the founder of Untold Italy Travel Podcast. And I'm here today with my friend, Danielle Oteri from Feast Travel. And we are here to just clear up some general Q&A for everyone because we see a lot, a lot, a lot of questions coming up in the group that are very common and we want to help clear them up. Now, we thought we'd have a chat about it and give you some tips on how you can make the most of your time in Italy by answering these main Q&A's. So as I mentioned, I'm Katy from Untold Italy and I'm your host in the Italy Travel Planning Group. I've run the group for, I don't know, it's nearly four years now, through the pandemic. It was super fun times. But now things are getting really busy, obviously, as people travel to Italy. So today, as I mentioned, we want to do some Q&A on some of the major questions that come up in this group daily. And thanks to our amazing team of moderators that keep things going and really try and filter out as many of the repeat questions as possible.

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Katy

But they're repeat questions for a reason. Now, when we have these repeat questions, we get a lot of opinions. And you know what? I'm all for diverse opinions and all of that. However, we don't really know sometimes what experience someone's had of traveling in Italy and what, especially recently, and what broad knowledge they have on the ground. So that's why I invited Danielle here because Danielle has many, many years experience traveling in Italy and she goes there at least twice a year and she's working with a lot of different providers on the ground. So I don't want to speak for you, though. So do you want to give yourself a quick introduction?

Danielle

Yes, thank you. Well, this year I'll be in Italy four times altogether, which is wonderful. I'm the founder of Feast Travel, and I do both travel consultations and full travel planning as well as small group tours in the south of Italy. And I have clients going all the time to Florence and Venice and Rome and doing all the big sites. And a lot of times I get questions and anxieties that have actually come from people reading blogs or reading Facebook groups. Right now, I'm getting tons of questions about, Oh, my gosh, I'm not going to be able to go to the Colosseum. And there are answers to all of these questions. But yes, as Katy said, I think that everybody's had their experience. And if you've only done Italy once, you did something that was maybe really great or really not. But repeat experience is how we will frame the answers to our questions because everybody has a good day, everyone can have a bad day. But it's the consistency that ultimately shapes the best answer.

Katy

Absolutely. I couldn't agree more. So let's just say hello to everyone that's joined us and thank you for saying hello. Look at all these wonderful people. So exciting. All across the world. That's what I love about this is I'm in Melbourne, Australia. Danielle's in New York.

Danielle

Different days.

Katy

And we're talking about Italy. So this is exciting. So here we go. All right. So the first question is this is a really good one, I think, because I just think in this age of self directed or self booking travel, sometimes we just don't know things that travel agents would. Okay. So one is the really interesting question is, and I don't think this question gets asked a lot actually, which I think it should be asked is which airport should you fly into when you're traveling to Italy? What do you think, Danielle?

Danielle

There are two major airports, Rome and Milan. Florence is tiny. I think I've mentioned it before in a podcast. They pick you up from the tarmac in a school bus. Naples is a little bit bigger. Naples is a little bigger. But Rome or Milan are the two big international airports.

Katy

Yeah. And so if you fly in this... So I think what happens is people think, Oh, I've got to get to the closest airport to where I'm going. So maybe it's Naples or maybe it's Venice or whatever. But the problem with that is that you're probably going to have to do a stop in another major hub in Europe, like London or Paris or Amsterdam. And then you're going to have to change airlines. And that's where everything goes wrong.

Danielle

And for those that are flying from the United States that are coming from the West Coast, try to lay over in Boston, New York, DC, Atlanta, so much better than trying to lay over in Heathrow or Charles De Gaul.

Katy

Those are big airports. Heathrow is massive. And it's a nightmare to deal with so many different terminals. I think it's one of the biggest in the world. So you stay with what you're familiar with and then access the more frequent flights out of those airports. Because I think the airport with the most flights would be JFK. Is that right?

Danielle

We have JFK and Newark airport all within close proximity. They're both huge international airports. So New York has a ton of options.

Katy

All right. So direct to Italy, which is what you want. You don't want to be navigating, getting out, doing passport checks. No. And that's the same from Australia. Or if you're traveling from New Zealand or probably Canada, I would suggest as well from your side, is that Rome and Milan are the two main hubs. And just go for those. And then what you do is you get the train, and the train is super easy. That's fun. I love getting the train. And you just relax, sit back and relax, and you'll be in your destination in no time. So that's a top tip, I think, because I think we had some guests on one of our tours that flew into... Some of them flying into Pisa and some that were flying into, one flew into Torino, which you can do for sure. But I think there might be more cost effective ways and easier ways to do those that travel. All right. So that was that's to start you off, really, because if you get the flight right, then you're going to make everything a lot easier.

Katy

So the next question is, because I think most people will go to Italy for 10 to 14 days. I think that's the average trip, even if you're coming from wherever you are in the world. But how many places should you try and see in that amount of time, do you think, Danielle? Because I think the gut feel is you want to see everything. It's impossible. I'm sorry to tell you. Unfortunately, sorry, we've both been traveling to Italy for decades, and we're not even close to seeing everything.

Danielle

I want to go back to everything that I've been to. And some of the places I've been to, I've been back to 20 times, and it's not enough. I need 10 more. So you're not going to get it all. It's impossible. Don't try. You think you can do it. You can't. I mean, honestly, for a 10 day trip, I say two locations. I know that's controversial, but 5 and 5, that's my best advice.

Katy

Yeah. And I think it's really useful... Two locations might sound, oh, that's a lot. But you can also do day trips from a lot of those places. And that can be a really effective way to use your time because you don't have to spend that time unpacking your luggage, getting from A to B. You're wasting a lot of time doing that. Well, I always say people should spend a minimum of three nights somewhere. So that does three locations. But I think if you're being super, you want to have that deep experience and really explore, then I think Danielle's right.

Danielle

Two locations. You can't underestimate the amount of friction that gets injected into your trip if you're moving around a lot because there's so much time wasted getting to and from train stations. Coming out of the train station to - Florence is famous for this. When you get out of the train station and you want to just grab a quick taxi, that taxi line once took me two hours. It can be real madness. And then there's like, are you traveling when you're hungry? And then everybody gets cranky because they really want a sandwich. I mean, there's so many things that can go wrong in all the transit. Then if something is late and you've booked a tour, right behind it, just I think minimizing your stops and really focusing your experience. And yes, doing day trips from places like Florence, Venice and Rome, especially, are really great ways to experience more locations without always having to unpack and get on another train.

Katy

Yeah. And I think Rome is a really great example because you can actually get to some really cool places from there. Like Naples is only an hour by train. Yeah.

Danielle

Or from Naples, you can go to Pompeii, you can go to Caserta, you can go to Capri, you can go to East Coast. Yeah, you can go to the Amalfi Coast. There's so many things that you can do if you stay in a city. And if you are spending time in the countryside as well, I think one of the things that always gives me anxiety when I see this on people's itineraries is they're going to transfer to the Tuscan countryside for one night or two. And I say, by the time you get settled and find a place to have coffee, it's time to go. So you really need to sink into a place, especially if it's a rural place. You need even more time to relax and enjoy.

Katy

Yeah, I think there's really smart ways you can do this. So I agree. So what do you think the combinations of those 2 5-days would be? I've got some ideas, but what about you?

Danielle

Well, it's always about prioritizing experience. I mean, if you're there, if you're more of a bucket list traveler, I'd say Florence and Rome. I just put together a beautiful trip for some clients. And what was nice about just doing Florence and Rome is that they got to go to some really nice restaurants and they got to really deploy their money on the experiences instead of on the transportation. And then they did do a one day tour to the Cinque Terre with a driver. And that was really nice. I think Rome and Naples is a great trip. Rome and Florence is a great trip. Venice and Milan is a fantastic trip with beautiful places in between or Milan and the Lakes. I don't know. How about you?

Katy

What do you think? I reckon Florence and Bologna could be.

Danielle

Yeah, absolutely. Or Modena. I mean, that whole area is very well connected on the train. So you can really explore Emilia Romagna in-depth even just from Florence.

Katy

And if you're really curious, then I think Milan and Turin, I love Turin. What a beautiful city. And I've had just had some clients come to me recently and they just go, I just want to go to Turin. And I'm like, That's wonderful. They've never been to Italy before. And I was like - amazing. Good for you.

Danielle

Genoa. Go to Genoa. Genoa, yes. Oh, my gosh. I know that there was an Untold Italy newsletter about Genoa, and I was cheering because what a wonderful city that is.

Katy

Yeah. And it's so great for the train. You just go up and down that coast and there's so many beautiful spots. And Genoa is such a cool city. I'm going to talk about this for ages. We went to some really amazing shops. If you're into design and really beautiful interiors, wow, amazing. And that's the same with Milan as well. So if you're the type of person that's really looking for a more, I don't know what the word is, if you're really into design, then those two cities, I couldn't think of a better combination, really.

Danielle

It's a dynamic place and it's a port town. It's like the Naples of the North and that a lot of people see graffiti and go, 'this is dangerous'. But it's a dynamic city. It's a real place with some really amazing history to explore.

Katy

I would say as well, though, if you're wanting to do Sicily, it's 10 days minimum. So I know I've had some people say to me, Oh, I just want to go over there for a few days. And I'm like, "Oh, no". You need to be there probably a week.

Danielle

Yeah. And it's just has its unique challenges of traveling to. You can't just dip in and out of Sicily easily. Sicily is a commitment. You're in that relationship with Sicily when you're there. And in order to enjoy it, you've got to be committed. So yeah, two or three days is nowhere near enough.

Katy

And it's worth it, by the way.

Danielle

Absolutely.

Katy

It's so worth it. You just have to surrender to it because you can't do everything. You just can't. And just I think the most important... With all the people in our Facebook group and all the people that follow our podcast, if I could just get one message across is don't... Unless you're really keen to just see things and take photos, try and look deep into your why you want to travel because otherwise, you get stuck into a sausage factory of activities which may not be really what you really deep down want. That takes experience. And I don't like to preach because everyone's got a different amount of time, a different budget, and all of those things. But if you can just really dig deep and think about why it is you want to be

where you want to be in Italy, then magic things will happen. Incredibly magic things will happen. So that would be my dream for all of you.

Katy

Okay. All righty, so 10 days now. Which is better? This is our next question. Which is better, an Airbnb or a hotel?

Danielle

All right. So this is a tiny, tiny little soap box. Airbnb is not a brand. It's a website with a lot of apartments on it. The Four Seasons is a brand. Airbnb is not. So I think Airbnb is great for families because getting several hotel rooms can be really expensive, especially with kids, sometimes you just need to have your own food. If you have traveling with lots of dietary restrictions. And again, you need your own fridge, you need your own food, do an Airbnb. But it's not a mark of it's not an Imprimatur. It's not a guarantee of quality. You've got to read those reviews so closely. And this goes for all the VRBO, all the house home sharing platforms. They are platforms, not brands. And I think for a couple... If it's just you and your partner traveling, get a hotel. My gosh. I mean, having them come make my bed every day is amazing. It's such a part of the experience for me. I love hotels.

Katy

If you're on vacation, yeah. But I mean, again, it depends on your budget. And I feel like I think people... Also, if you're traveling for a long time, it can be useful if they have washing machine or that type of thing, because sometimes, laundry can be a big problematic. And just as an aside, for some reason, it's very difficult to get laundry done on a weekend, generally speaking. Unless you're in one of the big five star hotels, I think you need to plan for that, or have materials that dry very quickly because not jeans. They might not ever dry in Italy. I'm just saying.

Danielle

I plan that on longer trips where midway I've got a washing machine and I can really start from create a clean slate. But yeah, you just need to read all those reviews. And you have to be really... I see so many times this happens in two locations in particular, which would be in Sorrento and in Tuscany, where every place says, "oh, it's only 20 minutes from"... whatever major point of transportation is. That's almost never the case. And you really need to look at the map to see if that home is in a really residential area. And very often, especially when you really fall in love with a villa in Sorrento or in the Tuscan countryside, they tend to be on residential roads or in very rural areas. And so you're not going to be able to pop into town easily to get a gelato or a coffee. And if you're with a lot of people, every time you need to go out, everybody needs to get in the car together. So that's a really important thing to consider. And if you do get one of those places, make sure that you know what the check in time is because you're probably...

Danielle

Well, actually more so in the city, sometimes you can't check in till a certain hour, but you're meeting the Airbnb host at a cafe. There's not a place to drop your luggage off. Not always. And then also if you're renting a villa, you need to ask the owner to stock it with some groceries because if you're arriving late in the afternoon, you want to make sure that you've got something to eat there or some coffee if it is in a residential area. So you have to be really extra careful and ask a lot of questions if you do, rent an apartment or a house.

Katy

And you know what? I'm going to speak on behalf of my children now. But my kids love the hotel. Do you know why they love it? They love it because of the breakfast. And we have a thing in our house which is Italian breakfast. And someone in our house is allowed to say, It's going to be Italian breakfast day today, mum. And I have to go and get all the Italian breakfast things, which are everything. Eggs. Well, most places do eggs now, even though that's not a traditional Italian breakfast. Eggs, prosciutto, cheese, several different types of cake.

Danielle

Yes, exactly.

Katy

You can load up for breakfast and not eat. We can have a snack for lunch because you probably won't be feeling too hungry. And then you can have a lovely dinner. And I think that's or a gelato. And so it's a way to... People think hotels are more expensive, but sometimes they're not, because if you can really load up on breakfast, you're going to save a bit of money on meals as well.

Danielle

I'm with your kids. I love a good breakfast buffet. I think that is such luxury to just wake up and have somebody ask me if I would like a cappuccino. Oh, my gosh.

Katy

Oh, my Gosh - yes, please. And just get the cappuccino. And I love the eggs because I just am more of a protein breakfast. But my kids, they just go to town on the cake. Oh, my gosh. And because they're on holiday, well, it's okay. But that's why. The other reason I like hotels is because you just don't have to think. Everything's done and you can just plunk. After a long day, you can relax. All right. I just want to say one other thing about Airbnb is that they've had a few challenges lately since COVID as well. Just really check the cancelation policies on all of those so you know exactly what's going on. Because I think most Airbnb now, many ask

you to pay up front. There's not a lot of cancellation options, and that's not the case necessarily with hotels. So it's a good practice anyway. And one more.

Danielle

Thing about Airbnb is this doesn't happen so commonly, but it does happen. European travelers in particular can be very thrifty because these might be family vacations. Somebody from Germany that's driving to Italy. You have a lot of Germans that go to Ischia, one of my favorite places in Italy. And sometimes an Airbnb is just too good a deal, look to make sure that it includes towels and sheets because a lot of the European families who are on a budget, they travel with those things and they're not provided. So again, just make sure that you don't find that so commonly anymore. But you find it. I've seen it on Airbnb not long ago.

Katy

My gosh. Yeah, that would be like a bit of a shock. I don't know. I'm getting old. I like my creature comforts. Like a sheet.

Danielle

I'm so into sheets when I sleep, yes.

Katy

Okay, question number 4, should I rent a car or take the train? This is a classic. It happens. It's a classic and it can be. Go for it.

Danielle

I think you should take the train whenever possible. I think that don't underestimate the amount of time that you will spend at the ticket desk. I have gotten stuck at the Rome rental car office for two hours. And then after making sure a million times with all my points and membership status that I was going to have an automatic, Senora, we have this very nice standard for you. There's a lot of knowing how to take shift is important. But I think the most important thing is in some places you have to drive. If you're doing Tuscany, you have to drive. If you're doing Umbria, 100 % you're driving, that's it. And you need to just be prepared. Also, take a look at the maps, take a look at the roads. Some regions are very easy to drive in. Puglia is flat, easy to navigate. Your GPS is always going to have a signal. Tuscany, Umbria, also very dark roads at night. Again, you have to think about the situation holistically and make the best decision. But I try to stick with the trains whenever possible.

Katy

Yeah, me too. I think it's just so easy to get on the train in the center of town and then you popped up right in the next town that you're going to. I did just a journey from Rome to Venice a few weeks ago, and it was just so easy to sit back and relax. And before you know it,

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you're there and you're jumping on your Vaporetto or your water taxi to your hotel. And it's just like a dream, really. You don't have to worry about a thing. And that's another thing is it's very rare that you'd need to fly within Italy at all unless you're going to one of the islands or you're going a very long distance. So for example, you need to fly to Sardinia or Sardegna, and you need to fly to Sicily, where you can actually get a train. But this is assuming you don't have heaps of time and weeks and weeks and weeks to be driving because there is no bridge between the mainland and Sicily. Well, they're trying to do one, but they've been trying for about half a century. So we won't hold our breath on that one.

Danielle

For example, you're flying to Venice and you rent a car in Venice, and then your next stop is Florence. Don't pick up the rental cars until you absolutely have to. If you're doing a Florence - Venice - round trip, for example, and you want to do a day in the Tuscan countryside, just rent the car for the day from Florence, preferably from outside the city. You don't want to drive in the city. Strategically, you still use the trains to transfer in between cities if that's the itinerary you have.

Katy

I wouldn't be doing... And I think as well, driving is not relaxing. And if you're going to Tuscany and you want to go and do some wine tasting, well, someone's going to... grab a tour. It's easier. You'll have a more relaxing time and you won't have to worry about all the different road rules, which we could... That's a whole another topic, which we could go on about for ages. But there are lots of different road rules and in particular, the historic zones. If you go in there, you might have a big fine, unfortunately. Florence is really notorious for that. I was even at my Pilates class the other day and a lady said, Oh, my God. I just got this bill. And I went, Yep.

Danielle

It can be really... Driving, if you're not... If you're assuming the roads are going to be approximate, something that you're used to, they're not. They're really, really different. And it's not always a stressor. I just think, again, you just need to really be prepared. Also, one of the things that's really important to do if you're in a mountainous area, download that GPS route ahead of time and have a paper map because your signal could cut out and it might come back very quickly. But you want that backup, that assurance that you've really looked at your route ahead of time and you have a good sense of where you're going and really also try to stick to highways. I think a lot of people say, oh, I want to take the scenic route. I want to see as much as possible. If you're not really familiar with these roads, especially through rural areas like Tuscany, Umbria, stick to the highways. And I think.

Katy

Danielle and I have got some both, even recent stories, fairly recent stories where we haven't taken our own advice. And we've got into a little bit of a struggle. Just think really carefully if you want a car. And by the way, you don't need a car on the Amalfi Coast. It's a bad idea.

Danielle

Don't. No, you should. If you want to drive a car on the Amalfi Coast, I have some pictures and videos for you. Do not do that. Do not. If that's in the equation for you, remove it. That's insane.

Katy

It's just not worth the stress, is it?

Danielle

It's not even passable - it's crazy.

Katy

It's not the fact that the roads windy, which it is. It's very windy. It's not that the fact that it's just bumper-to-bumper, right? Especially in summer. And they change the rules all the time. So last year they changed the rules so that you couldn't drive, tourists couldn't drive on alternate days just like that. They just changed it. But how are you parking nightmare?

Danielle

To me, it's not even a consideration. It's not even a well, if you could, if you didn't. No, the answer is no. Negative. Totally.

Katy

So that is our thing. Now, we actually have a question here, which I think is a really good one from Sophie, which will just pop up here. She said her and her family are traveling to Italy at the end of the month and starting in Amalfi. One of the days they want to take the ferry to Capri. She saw that you can only buy tickets to the Blue Grotto there in person. Do we need to figure out how to travel from where the ferry lands to where the small boats for the Blue Grotto starts? Great question, Sophie. And you can either get to the start of the Blue Grotto by bus, or there's tours that lead from the harbor there in Marina Grande. So that's your two options, or you can get a taxi to where the Blue Grotto starts. But it's really dependent. Any tour that guarantees you a Blue Grotto trip is... Because they can't. Yeah. Because of the...

Danielle

It's shut down and closed three times within one hour, going to Blue Grotto is not something that you can put on the list and say 100 % I'm going to do it. I hope it works out at best.

Katy

Yeah. So I went there last year and it was amazing. But I'll tell you what, though, you just feel like. Well, I'm glad I did it. But I'm also wondering where all that... For the 10 minutes that it took to be in that thing and for the guy to sing, for the extra... Anyway, it ended up... It's a very expensive 10 minute experience, let's just say. And I feel like it'd be money. You can also have an amazing experience by taking a boat around the island and dipping into all the other grottoes because there's lots of other grottoes. But if you do do that, try and get the smallest boat possible because this is my favorite boat on Capri. It goes this huge big boat and it goes rrrrrr - right up to things and people are hanging off the side with their camera. It doesn't seem very relaxing.

Danielle

No. And I suppose honestly, the good ones are pricey.

Danielle

Capri is not a bargain. Don't try to bargain shopping in Capri because it's not.

Katy

Going to be a pricey place. It's a luxury destination. It's a very small island. Supply and demand, simple things. And so, yeah, I mean, even when you expect it to be quite expensive, I was pretty shocked myself last year just at how pricey... Even just to get on the bus, one trip is two euros, I think. So you had a family of four, and then you're just doing little bus trips everywhere. It quickly adds up. And then a taxi to go 10 minutes is I think €40.

Danielle

That's if you can get in onto one. I mean, sometimes you really have to wait quite a long time to even get one. So it's moving around Capri is difficult.

Katy

I think you're going to like this comment.

Danielle

Ischia is better than Capri in every way. That is the truth. And I love Capri. I mean, don't get me wrong, but it's too crowded. The magic is, I don't know. I have a tour guide who's going to

do a tour this year called Capri in winter. And I'm like, Sign me up, because when you're going to experience the magic, but in high season, it is a meat grinder. Yeah.

Katy

We've actually got a podcast about Capri in winter, which is with Holly, who lives there and runs a cooking class on Capri. And yeah, she's got a beautiful description of what it's like there in winter with all the lights and the really beautiful local traditions because it is an island and they have their very proud culture of their own island. And if you are able to experience that, that is something more magical than the blue grotto, to be honest.

Danielle

Absolutely. I was there on Palm Sunday, many years ago, while there was a procession in the middle of Anacapri, and it's one of the most beautiful memories that I possess.

Danielle

And. you know. A million times better than the blue grotto.

Katy

Yeah, exactly. Here's another question that I think is really great to answer, Danielle. Everyone talks about all the walking you will do. Is it a walking-friendly city to go for, say, the area by the Trevi fountain over to the Vatican, or is it better to take public transportation?

Danielle

I think that's a very personal decision. I'm a walker. I love walking. I live in a city, so I'm used to a lot of walking. Think of Rome as a giant open-air museum. And so you could wonder if you're going to go to the... Say you have a Vatican tour in the afternoon, hypothetically, spend the morning meandering your way over there, stopping in churches, stopping for a gelato, stopping to have lunch and make your way there. That's how I suggest you experience those places. And then at the end of the day, at the end of that Vatican tour, you're tired, just take a cab back. Because I think the transportation in Rome... Naples has an amazing public transportation system. Rome? Not so much. Well, it's not so much. It's not so good. So yeah, I think a strategic taxi is the best use of your time with walking as much as you possibly can.

Katy

Absolutely. And in Rome, there's a taxi app that works like Uber, and it's called Free Now. And really, it's the best thing is to use it because you don't want to be... These things go wrong when you start getting in taxes without that app. The prices go up and all of this. With the app, you get tracked, everything's the same. You pay on the app, everything's easy. To be honest, it's the easiest way. I'm actually traveling to Rome in September with my parents who are in their mid 70s, and my dad has some mobility issues. And so this is what Danielle says is

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mixing it up and getting a strategic taxi here and there is very smart because even if you're not traveling with mobility issues, you're going to be doing 20,000 steps a day easily just because there isn't really an option in a lot of places to even get a taxi. So just to be aware, if you're not used to doing a lot of walking, it might be good to get those sneakers on and start going outside, walking, get some fresh air and up and down hills. And you get used to those cobbled stones.

Katy

But it's amazing, as Danielle said, it's like an open air museum. It's the best.

Danielle

Yeah. The contrast in Rome, it's like archeological sites, Baroque Churches, modern building, fascist architecture. There's just so much to take in. And that's how you should. You should just stop and wander and be curious.

Katy

This is a great question here. It seems like it's high season now, year-round. There are really no shoulder seasons anymore. Do we agree?

Danielle

Well, yeah, certainly this year. This is truly the COVID come-back year because last year you still had to test in order to come back into the US and elsewhere. And so this is just a really extremely busy year. I think it will continue. Italy is just a very popular destination, rightfully so. And I think that you have to take these things into consideration when choosing your locations, because if crowds are not your thing, then you really do need to think differently about how you travel. And plenty of amazing options, but you'll need to think beyond the traditional options. Yeah.

Katy

And also be very considered about how you do tackle those traditional options. I really don't like crowds. I'm not a crowds person. Yuck. And so even in the start of April, it was so busy in Rome. And I think that when it's your first time and everything, it's great. And you're like, but for me now, like many, many times in Rome, for me, it's a little bit unpleasant, unfortunately. So just try and work out a place to stay that's in a fairly quiet area, but where you can walk to places. I think that's a really good idea. A hotel where you can just decompress after a long day. And I think you can really do this in a smart way. But above all, I think what I would love to say to people is if you choose to do some of those classic places, then just try and go out in the countryside and try and do something a little bit different because you won't... That'll stay with you your whole life, I guarantee it. I'm going to put 100 % guarantee on it. If you try and go to some of these smaller towns outside of Rome, Oviato is a beautiful, beautiful place.

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Katy

There's so many gorgeous stops. From Florence, you can go to Arezzo, which hardly anyone goes to. But most people go to Lucca or Siena. Arezzo is just gorgeous. And it's one of those places where you can just wander around. And it's not built for tourists. It's just doing its thing, like it has for centuries. And it's just a beautiful place. And they're the way you will have the memories for sure.

Danielle

I think a lot of people experience an anxiety of that they're missing the best stuff and that the most popular stuff is the best stuff. And I really want to encourage people to not think of Italy as a theme park. And sometimes people are like, I got to go to the Colosseum and in the Vatican. I got to get on Magic Mountain. No, you don't have to do any of those things. Just because they're the most famous things or the most iconic things doesn't mean that they are the best thing. The best thing, again, is going to be what matches the experience that you're most looking to have. And that's a nuanced question to ask yourself. There's a few different things, and we can talk about that a little bit more. But I just don't treat Italy like a theme park and feel like if you didn't take the gondola ride that you missed out on Italy, it's just not the case. If you've been there as many times as we have, we just know that it's endless. And those things are just not even that great compared to some of the...

Katy

What about... Just in terms of the Colosseum, for example. It's an incredible building and it's so iconic and all of those things. But just next door, you've got the Domus Aurea. And I was there just a few months ago. Oh, my gosh. Not only is it a very interesting place with amazing frescos and mosaics and an incredible story behind it, but they've done a really great presentation where you can actually experience what it was like back 2,000 years ago when Nero built this palace. And this is something that, unfortunately, in a lot of the historic sites in Italy, they don't do a particularly good job of. But in this Domus Aurea, I think they do an amazing job. And they have a virtual reality experience where you're sitting there and you feel like they've got the view back over Rome. They've made it into augmented reality. It's so cool. It's one of the best uses of technology that I've seen. And I would recommend that to anyone that's interested in Roman history. .

Danielle

Or the Baths of Caracalla, which are massive. And if you're interested in Roman history, if you really want to understand what ancient Rome was like for rich people, for enslaved people, for all citizens, go to the Baths of Caracalla. It's actually far more interesting. It's easy to engage because it was about sports. And certainly the exterior of it, when you see it, is like, Oh, my gosh, there's the Colosseum. But if you're interested in the history, Baths of Caracalla, Domas Aurea, Baths of Diocletian, the Appian Way, you'll get such a more rich experience. Yeah, I agree.

Katy

And I think Colosseum is amazing and the Roman Forum, this is the thing. People often just go to the Colosseum and skip the Roman forum. That's actually probably one of the more interesting bits if you're with a guide, though, because it's not very well... Yeah, it's hard.

Danielle

To understand. It looks like a Monday.

Katy

They just go, Here it is. Enjoy. Well, let's learn a bit about it anyway. I mean, everyone's different. I'm just a massive history nerd, massive. And there's some really cool podcasts, actually. There's one called Emperor of Rome that goes into all the details of the empress. Anyway, I love all that stuff, so I love learning about and stepping in the footsteps of these people. But everyone's different, I guess. Okay, well, we're running out a little bit over time, but we're going to keep doing these, aren't we, Danielle? We'll just keep doing them. But I've just got one more question here that I wanted to put. Sena said she was contemplating staying in guest houses. And would you recommend these or not?

Danielle

There's no blanket. It's not like all guest houses are great. I don't know. It's going to depend on each and everyone and their specific reviews and locations. So there's just not a one simple answer for that. Yeah.

Katy

I think, again, read the reviews and if you're wanting... It's probably a more personal experience if you get a B&B with a nice host with a small number of rooms. But again, there can be good ones and bad ones. And also it's not just hotels or Airbnbs. We really didn't go into the other options that people have. There's so many different options in Italy. We love an agriturismo, which is a farm stay. Amazing. I love that as an option or a maserita in Puglia, a baleo in Sicily. They're like mini resorts, really, aren't they, sometimes with a pool and a restaurant on site and very charming. Look, there's so many options in Italy. I think what Danielle and I both think is that keep an open mind and be curious, ask questions, know what your motivations are for traveling, and you will find a whole magical world open up for you like it has for both of us. All right. Okay. So we had a lot of questions about guides and tour groups or the thing is, it's really hard to recommend particular guides because for starters, when you have a group of 110,000 people, if everyone goes to an individual guide, unfortunately, they're going to be a little bit disappointed because the guide is not going to be able to answer your emails or even be able to accommodate so many people because it really does, this group generates a lot of demand.

Katy

So the thing is, we do you can search. There's some reputable companies that we mention a lot on our Facebook group, and you can use them. Particularly like LivT oors. They are amazing local company who do very small group tours of six people or under, and they operate in the major cities. So that's one company I recommend. However, the other thing is, if you want to pull together something and you're really struggling, then there are options. Unfortunately, me and my team at Untold Italy, while we do offer a lot of free resources, we don't offer trip planning services. However, Danielle does. Do you want to talk a bit about that? Sure.

Danielle

I do one on one trip consultations for people that just want to ask all their questions or they want to strategize their trip. I really don't want you to have a cookie-cutter experience. I will ask you all sorts of questions about the kinds of experiences that you want to have. And I will try to put in a little adventure, put in a little luxury. But these are one on one sessions that you can book with me via Zoom. I record them. I also open up the database that I use to plan trips for our private clients and put all those resources, specific resources that I recommend to you, like tour guides, into this document that's all fully illustrated. And I send you the link to it at the end. So it's like having a little guide book made just for you. And then I do full travel planning as well. But I've really had so much fun doing these consultations. I've met so many wonderful people and had so many great conversations. And I really feel like now I have learned so much about what people are most worried about when they travel, what their anxieties are, what their fears are, and what they're really looking for, even if they don't know it themselves.

Danielle

So I think I've honed my diagnostic skills in terms of a good experience of it to be at this point. I'll put it this way.

Katy

I'll be getting her to plan my trip. So Danielle's helping me have an amazing experience in a beautiful part of the world that she knows very well, South of the Atlantic Coast. And I'm so, so excited to be heading there in September with my family and my friends. But yeah, so she will give you the honest and... And I'm.

Danielle

Very honest because sometimes people will say, What do you think of that location? I'm like, It's a dump. Don't go there. I do not hesitate to tell you the truth. And some people will insist, But what if I go at this month? I will be honest with you. I will not say, Oh, it's Bellissima. If it's not.

Katy

Yeah, exactly. I just need to put this comment up because this is a beauty. Hey, it's Carolyn.

Danielle

Hi, Carolyn. Carolyn is.

Katy

One of our super, super friends and we love her. And it's great to hear from you too, Carolyn. Okay, this is another question. Look, this really deserves a lot of more exploration. And I am really searching for someone who can talk about accessible travel in Italy. And I'm here to find someone because I really want to do a really long conversation on the podcast about it because I feel like it's a big issue. A lot of people want to travel to Italy and who maybe have some mobility issues and other disabilities. And I think it's really important to cater for everyone. So if anyone has any contacts at any of these or knows anyone who can talk extensively about accessible travel in Italy, I'd love to hear from them because I'm very tied to find the right person. Anyway, we've come to the end of our time. But thanks, everyone, for hanging on and listening. It's been great. We'll put Danielle's details into the notes here. And of course, there'll be a replay of this, too. We'll actually publish this as a podcast. So as we do a podcast, all of our podcasts come with detailed show notes, so you'll have that as well.

Katy

Okay. So it's lovely to have everyone online and it's great to see everyone getting so excited about their trips to Italy. And just go with your heart. Go with your heart and Italy will give it back in spades. Thanks, Danielle. Great being with you.

Danielle

Again, Katie. This was so much fun as usual. It's always fun.

Katy

Bye.

Katy

When you've been involved in helping travelers plan trips to Italy as long as Danielle and I have it's true that these questions come up again and again. But it's also true that, just as each of us is uniquely different, so will be or can be your Italy travel plans.

If you're feeling a bit overwhelmed with your planning, Danielle offers trip-planning consultations to help you plan the Italian trip of YOUR dreams. All her details are in the episode show notes at untolditaly.com/175 along with places and services we mentioned on the podcast.

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Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did then it would be amazing if you gave us a rating or review in your favorite podcast app just like Tzcatz from the United States did on Apple podcasts.

They wrote - "Great resource to learn tips and tricks where you're going, find other places to go, learn about unique experiences to be had, and much more. They really dig into details about each area. In fact, I reached out to home-schooling friends and suggested the podcast as a neat Geography resource for their kids!"

Grazie mille Tzcatz! That review really made our day. We love knowing our resources are useful and that you think highly enough of them to share them with your friends.

That's all for this week, next week I'm going to share some of my favorite free things to do in one of the world's most expensive cities to visit - Venice!

But until then it's "ciao for now".