Untold Italy Episode 187 - Cheap Eats in Italy - Tasty Street Foods to Try

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 187.

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! Buongiorno everyone. Who is feeling a little hungry today? Well, if you're not already prepared to be famished after we're finished with this culinary journey of Italian street food from north to south.

Street food is one of the best ways to really sink your teeth into the local culture - sorry pun intended!- wherever you go and especially in Italy where the locals develop their own traditions and snacks based on what produce is available and generally speaking, how workers could quickly fuel up on the go. Compared to restaurant dining it's cheap and fast, but also super tasty and will keep you energized for hours while you continue your adventures in Italy.

This is the original fast food but let's not compare what they are serving up with our mass-produced fare. Make no mistake, a lot of care and attention plus great ingredients go into making street food in Italy.

So today I'm going to tell you about some favorites and where you can find them. It's not an exhaustive list but you could actually make a whole Italian street food itinerary from these suggestions and if you do, let me know!

OK so of course we have to start with the original street food beloved the world over which is naturally Pizza! Naples is the undisputed home of pizza but I'm here to tell you that you'll find different varieties up and down the country. So why not compare and contrast?

Of course, we'll start with a classic.

Katy
Pizza Napoletana.
If we were writing a rule that simplicity is the best then surely pizza napoletana would be the prime example. Just a handful of ingredients go into making this iconic Italian street food so

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they must be the very best. Flour, yeast salt and water make the dough which is allowed to rest (sometimes for days) before its topped with crushed san marzano tomatoes, mozzarella, basil and extra virgin olive oil and then cooked in a very hot wood-fired oven for around 90 seconds. Out it comes, piping hot, dough puffed up and cheese melted and incredibly delicious. So delicious in fact that in an attempt to recreate this magic it's said that restaurants in new york have imported not just the flour but even the water from Naples to try and replicate pizza napoletana.. To no avail!

If you want to learn more about Neapolitan pizza we did a deep dive with my friend Pierpaulo (who says he eats about 5 a week)! in episode 73.

Pizza a taglio.
Head on up to Rome and you'll find a completely different style of pizza with a much thinner crust that's usually cooked in an electric oven. Sold by the slice and usually cut up with scissors, you gesture to the server how much you would like and they'll wrap it up for you. In Rome, you'll find different toppings too like Pizza Bianca or white pizza made simply salt and olive oil. If you're staying near Campo de Fiori in Rome you can try this at the Forno or bakery in the western corner of the piazza

Trapizzino.
I was introduced to another, more modern take on pizza, by our friend Nesim who you've heard talk about Roman cuisine on earlier episodes. This is the trapizzino or stuffed pizza which is a meal unto itself. Fillings include eggplant parmigiana, polpette or meatballs, chicken cacciatore and more. They like to do seasonal flavors and you'll often find offal-based ones too which is very popular in Rome so make sure to check the ingredients if you're not a fan of that!

In Sicily, pizza is also called sfincione. The version from Palermo is rectangular with a thick crust and usually topped with tomatoes, onions, herbs and anchovies as well as strong local cheese.

Of course, you'll find pizza up and down the country with different toppings and techniques. I love a pizza bianca with shaved truffles which you find in the middle to north of Italy. Yum!

We could probably devote a whole episode to different pizza varieties (and no doubt we will one day) so I'm going to move on to some street food snacks that Italians love - fried foods! But we're not talking about chips or french fries here. Oh no.. the frying brings out the flavor and adds texture to ingredients.

Katy
The fried.

Olive ascolana - these are olives stuffed with meat, coated in breadcrumbs and fried. Usually served at aperitivo they are the perfect foil to your evening tipple. These tasty morsels are

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from the town of Ascoli Piceno in the region Le Marche but you can imagine my excitement when I found them here in Australia. Not quite the same but still delicious.

Fritto misto - fish, zucchini flowers or little dough balls, there's nothing like grabbing a cone of fried treats to munch from a roadside stall. I've noticed the "fried" van at locations up and down Italy - at the fish markets in Naples and the street markets in the northern region of Lombardy. You can also try fileti di baccala in Rome and sorry English visitors, it's a lot more tasty than your average battered fish.

Then of course there is Scagliozzi - fried polenta - a bit like a hot potato chip. This one's from Puglia and there's something so moreish about the crunchy crust and creamy center that keeps you coming back for more

In Emilia, they like Gnocco fritto - fried dough that's served with the rich cured meats of the region. I love the crunch that pairs perfectly with the creamy texture of the meat. It's a delicious combination

Last but not least you may not be surprised to learn that pizza is also fried. Pizze fritte are pizza dough rounds stuffed with tomato and mozzarella cheese cooked in the fryer.

This is all seriously good stuff and difficult to resist if you spot these fried foods on your travels. They are quite rich so grab a cone and share your fried goods. You won't regret it.

Katy
Now we're going to talk about The savory pastries and breads you can find all across Italy in various forms. These are usually sold from a forno or bakery and there are so many different varieties to choose from across Italy's region but we'll mention a few here

Rustico from Puglia - is made with flaky puff pastry and filled with tomato and creamy bechamel sauce. I tried this in Lecce and it was amazing and quite different from the other varieties of pastry and bread in Italy - almost French actually. But better obviously!

In beautiful Liguria they are known for wonderful use of chickpeas and Farinata or chickpea flour pancakes are the ultimate expression of this flavored with onion and rosemary. Of course, we include tasting farinata straight from the oven in our food and wine tour of Liguria

As well as Focaccia - again, straight out of the oven is best, this amazing flatbread is something to behold whether you like the Ligurian style served simply with olive oil and salt or the equally delicious Barese style with tomato and olives in Puglia's capital Bari

Heading back to central Italy the Emilia region, keep an eye out for tigelle - a traditional disk-shaped bread that is made in special clay moulds and served with a spread made with Parmigiano Reggiano cheese and other delicious flavors. The lucky guests on our Beyond

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Bologna tour learn how to make this bread and hear the stories of its past on our tour of that region

In Milan, there's a famous shop around the corner from the Duomo called Luini that sells panzerotti or small pastry pockets filled with various things like cheese, salami, tomato and even Nutella. Originally from Puglia, these tasty treats are a great refueling option in Milano - I'm just warning you that you'll probably regret buying just one

Lastly in Umbria, they enjoy crescia, a flat bread perfect for stuffing with cured meats and cheeses but also tasty on its own

Katy
In case you were thinking that there's a whole lot of carb action happening here - and you wouldn't be wrong - these foods were traditionally created to feed hungry workers cheaply. However, there are also protein-based street foods, that you might like to try

Let's head to Abruzzo where the street snack of choice is Arrosticini or barbecued cubes of skewered meat - usually lamb or mutton - dressed with some salt and olive oil. Delicious.

Bombette are rolls of capocollo or pork neck, salt, pepper, rosemary, parsley and cheese cooked on a spit found in Puglia. We first tried these at a restaurant we visit on our Puglia tour and were thrilled with the flavor bomb that met our tastebuds

Also in Puglia Crudo or fresh seafood straight from the water is another tasty street snack. I'm still reeling at the cost (so cheap) of the sea urchins that are split in two so you can scoop the flesh out at eat with a squeeze of lemon or just naturally. These would sell for exorbitant prices anywhere in the world but here - you can try for just €1.

And for you cheese lovers, you can stop by little stores in Naples for little bowls of the best Mozzarella you've ever tasted drizzled with olive oil and with a few juicy small tomatoes for color and flavor.

Now if you're hankering to combine your carbs and proteins a sandwich is obviously the answer. Have you seen the huge sandwiches at All Antico Vinao? This Florentine store is taking Instagram and Florence (and now rome) by storm. Personally, I don't line up for half an hour for any sandwich but if you want to go ahead please do but I'm also going to give you some other alternatives that are just as good, perhaps better.

Lampredotto is the traditional sandwich of Florence and the inspiration for the aforementioned sandwich store. Served in a panino - a type of bread roll that has been filled with meat actually fourth and final stomach of a cow, that has been slow-cooked with tomato, onion, parsley, and celery until it is tender. It's topped with a zingy salsa verde green sauce. You can find stalls selling this Florentine delicacy all over town or head to the San

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Lorenzo market with my friend Toni from Taste Florence on one of her tours and she'll help you select a super tasty version

Piadina is the flatbread of the Romagna region that is filled with meats and cheeses. This one is perfect if you prefer your filling-to-bread ratio to be weighted to the side of the fillings.

Not to be outdone in the fillings stakes, you'll want to go to Umbria for your Porchetta panino. This is perhaps the ultimate sandwich according to my husband - a roll filled with juicy slow-cooked roast pork stuffed with herbs. You can also find this sandwich in Rome so look out for it. There are a few places around the Campo de Fiori market in the center

Katy
Before we move on to some sweet items I wanted to finish on some rice options

Arancini are a staple of Sicilian street food. Made with cooked rice and stuffed with meat, peas and cheese, they are rolled in breadcrumbs and fried for a delicious afternoon treat.

In rome, Suppli are similar however a bit smaller and generally only filled with mozzarella cheese which oozes out when you bite into them or break them in two. You'll find supplil all over Rome and often in pizza places for the ultimate pre pizza snack!

Katy
Desserts.

Cannoli - perhaps Sicily's best-known dish or sweet treat are cannoli. These tubes of crunchy pastry are filled with freshly whipped ricotta and let me tell you. You'll never be able to eat a cannolo at home again after you've chomped into a proper Sicilian one. You won't find a Sicilian cannolo pre-filled. Oh no. that would make the pastry soggy. What is required here is the perfect crunch-to-cream ratio and that oh my god moment when the combination hits your taste buds. A lot of people visit Sicily just to try cannoli and I really don't blame them. Dare I say it, this sweet done properly is life-changing!

Across the Tyrrhenian Sea in Naples they also have a penchant for sweet treats thanks to the ruling Bourbon dynasty in the 18th century and their queen Maria Carolina (sister of Marie Antoinette of "let them eat cake" fame) Although it has to be said, Maria Carolina was a lot more savvy than her sister.
But we digress. Thanks to this international influence there are a plethora of sweet treats to try in Naples like…

Sfogliatelle -flaky layers of pastry are cooked until crunchy and then filled with cream or ricotta.

Rum baba - small yeast cakes drenched in syrup - typically rum.

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And also more modern creations like il fiocco di neve - snowflakes in English which are little dough balls filled with cream and dusted with sugar. You can try those at Pasticceria Poppella in the city's Sanita district. They have traditional sweet there too.

Over to the east in Puglia, the treat of choice is known as pasticciotto. It's a shortcrust pastry filled with custard and jam often eaten for breakfast and best served just warm out of the oven.

Katy
Speaking of breakfast, Italians love a sweet breakfast and in Rome the thing to eat is a Maritozzo or bun filled with cream to order. It's a decadent street food for sure and there's a lovely pasticceria right near Piazza Navona called Pasticceria Cinque Lune where they'll prepare your Maritozzi and wrap them beautifully in a gorgeous gold-colored tray and red paper. It seems a shame to wreck the decoration until you take a bite of the bun - oh my goodness

Katy
Gelato - which brings us to the last street food I'll mention and perhaps the one to rule them all. Gelato! Made to be eaten on the go, gelato is for strolling along the street, taking your time and enjoying the flavors. Whether you like creamy or fruity gelato it's best to enjoy one a day in Italy for the ultimate cultural and street food experience. We did a whole episode on gelato - episode 157 - explaining where to find the best and out favorite spots but here's a community service announcement. If the gelato is piled high sporting colors that do not represent anything natural you should avoid it and find a place that stores their deliciously melty gelato in tubs.

Ok there you have it, our guide to Italian street foods and definitely not an exhaustive list! Street foods are a great on-the-go option and can keep those energy levels up as you enjoy your adventures in Italy.

Katy
A really great way to discover more delicious dishes like this and places to eat is on a food tour. So make sure you do at least one when you're in Italy and you'll be munching your way around Italian food heaven you're whole trip.
Now we know some of the names we mention in the podcast are tricky so of course they are in the episode show notes on our website at untolditaly.com/187 Here you'll find show notes for each and every episode as well as hundreds of useful articles to help you plan your Italian trips - from accommodation guides to region information and things to do, we're building Untold Italy into a one-stop destination for your Italy travel plans.

We'd like to thank you for all your support of Untold Italy and your enthusiastic messages and reviews. It means the world to us that so many people from countries around the world tune in each and every week to listen to the show. If you do enjoy it, it would be incredible if you

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took a few moments to write a quick review or give us a rating on your favorite podcast app. Grazie mille in advance! We appreciate you!

That's all for today, on next week's episode we're bringing on the late summer vibes with podcast favorite Corinna Cooke returning to share her beachy Italian dreams but until then it's "ciao for now".

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