

Untold Italy Episode 195: How to plan your Italy trip for free

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 195.

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. Buongiorno! I hope you're all well and dreaming of Italy. Today's episode is a short but important one. I want to talk to you today about the serious business of travel planning and discuss the title of this episode, How to get a personalized Italy travel plan for free. Because, of course, yes, sorry about the click-bite title, it is actually impossible to get a highly personalized travel plan for your trip to Italy for free. And I'm going to get a little bossy, I'm afraid, because unfortunately, many people seem to think that for some reason, all travel advice should be completely free or done as a favor... which is bizarre because for any other purchase of thousands of dollars, you would probably seek out and pay for some professional advice.

Katy

Now, you might be thinking, Of course, travel isn't free, Katy. To be clear, I'm not talking about paying for plane tickets or hotel rooms or activities. No, this episode is about how you access and compile the information you need to plan the trip of your dreams and pull it all together into a magnificent plan. I'm here to tell you it is not free whichever way you cut it.

Katy

You can, of course, pay different prices or even in kind, just as with any services, but it's never free because even if you're not paying someone directly, you're paying with your time, which is really valuable, right? All your data and the eyeballs in your head with advertising and also cash if you choose to buy some books or downloads or engage a travel agent or trip planner.

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Katy

Let me explain further. Travel planning is a serious business. It takes hours upon hours to get things right, even if you're a professional travel agent or planner. Some people may really enjoy doing this and treat it like a hobby. I'm actually one of those people. Although now, when it comes to travel in Italy at least, it's my job. If I was planning a trip to Japan or Greece, however, the time I spent building up an amazing travel plan is time I could have spent doing something else, like reading, playing with my kids, spending time with my friends, or watching a movie. Depending on how detailed you like your plan, and I know a lot of you do, this can take weeks of planning time. First, you need to decide where you're going and what you want to do, which I know is challenging for many of you, me included. You scroll around the internet, listen to podcasts like this one, and build an ever-growing list of places, experiences, and things you just can't miss. Then you need to pull it all together, understanding transportation systems, when things are open and closed, and how long you need to schedule to get between each activity that you're doing. Perhaps something is sold out or not available when you want to do it, so you need to adjust your plans again. Unfortunately, gone are the days where you can just wing it in the big tourist areas. You definitely need a plan in Rome, Florence, Venice, Tuscany, the Amalfi Coast, and Cinque Terre, unless you're happy to spend your vacation standing in a line and/or eating terrible food. Unless you have a lot of time on your hands, you need to get to grips with getting around Italy if you're going into the lesser visited areas.

Katy

Now, I want to give a big shout-out to all of you who do the trip planning on behalf of family and friends. It is a big job, right? And one that I know you enjoy doing. But perhaps sometimes not everyone appreciates the effort that you put in. But I do. I see you and I know you do it because you truly care about everyone having a great vacation. So well done. At Untold Italy, we have spent countless hours, months, years even creating audio and written content to help you with this on both our podcast and websites, which we take care to keep very well up to date. We have articles on where to stay, what to do, and lots of specific information about the different regions of Italy, and it grows and grows with each day and week. This information is, however, of course, general in nature, and we can't address every specific travel need. And this is where things get a bit tricky because it is general information and it's not personalized. That's when many travelers turn to our Italy Travel Planning community on Facebook for help. This is another place where you can also spend a lot of time supplementing your research and trying to make sure your plan makes sense. You can literally

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spend days there refining your plans as different people jump in and try and help you. That is a great service, and we set it up, and we love having people share their travel plans, but you need to realize that it's going to take time to sift through this information and work out whether the person that's providing it has the same idea of a great travel plan as you and/or is really qualified to give you the information. Once again, you're paying with your time no matter what. Of course, let's not forget you're viewing content online, so you're paying with your eyeballs in terms of advertising and other online tactics. And full disclosure, of course, I use them. So, this is probably the cheapest way to build your travel plan, depending on how much you value your time and the effort you want to put into planning. However, to be very clear, you are not getting personalized advice. If you do want that advice, you'll need to engage a professional travel planner or travel agent, and you need to expect to pay for that service just like you would any other professional service.

Katy

Here at Untold Italy, we get hundreds of emails a week asking for personalized support. Things like, "oh, can you just recommend a restaurant in Rome for a special occasion", or "a place for a family to stay in Puglia?" and our guests have also told us they are inundated with 'quick request' emails, and I put the quick request in quotes because they're not quick. Please understand that we cannot answer these in any detail. I would need to hire several people to do that. So you will be referred to our online resources. As that's the case, please take the initiative and check there first and if you can't find the answer, head on over to the Facebook group where someone may be able to help. We have an eight-strong team here at Untold Italy that creates and updates content, moderates our Facebook community, and more. We're very passionate about ensuring you have a kind and positive experience accessing the most up-to-date information about travel in Italy.

Katy

Now, some people who email us don't even send a greeting like, "Hi, Katy", or make a kind comment, and they simply make demands. In that case, sorry, not sorry, your email is deleted immediately. I'm not sure what happened to manners lately, but we are human beings with feelings, and we also have literally thousands of resources at your disposal to help. You might be wondering now how you can access these personalized trip-planning services. At this time, we only offer these services to guests joining our small group tours in the lesser-known regions of Italy, and we have no plans to change this. So if you're looking for those services, we refer inquiries of that nature to our friend, Danielle Oteri from Feast Travel, who has appeared on this podcast many times and who I trust implicitly to help you plan an amazing

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trip to Italy. In fact, Danielle has planned half of our recent trip to Italy to the Cilento region because I know that she has the in-depth knowledge and contacts to make this trip special and will save me hours of time and research and also money because she knows the best value ways to do things. Of course, there is a fee for that service, just as there should be. Danielle is definitely not sitting around her house thinking, Oh, gosh, I hope an email comes in where I can give away my time and expertise for free. I hope that's not too blunt, but unfortunately, that's what some people seem to expect. The point I'm trying to make is that if you want personalized assistance, however small you think it is, please understand that there is likely to be a cost associated with it. Now, if you don't join one of our tours or engage Danielle, I advise looking for another travel planner or agent that has specific knowledge about travel in Italy and even in the specific area of Italy that you want to visit.

Katy

There are plenty of generalist travel agents out there, but honestly, I don't see the point of that as they don't have the time or resources to invest in understanding what is possible in every country of the world, let alone all of the regions of Italy. If you want a truly personalized Italian trip, look for a planner that has the expertise about Italy and the specific area who can help you the best. All my colleagues and I ask is that you respect our time and expertise. We deliver so many weekly resources to help you plan your trips with thoroughly research and up-to-date information. Unlike TV shows and other media, we thoroughly document all of our podcast guest suggestions in our show notes for you so you can access this information easily. Now, unfortunately, I've actually had guests recently declined to come back on the podcast because they don't want to deal with any more requests for unpaid assistance. This is really upsetting and sad for me and for everyone because they have already been so very generous with their time and knowledge. It's up to you. Invest your time listening to podcasts like this or browsing websites, and you'll get a general idea of what to expect when you go to Italy, and then you'll need to knuckle down and do the specific logistics planning for your trip yourself.

Katy

I've traveled like this independently for most of my life and thoroughly enjoyed it, and that's why we created this podcast and our website. But I have to say, when time is precious or you know you simply cannot find the information you need online, then engaging a travel planner or agent to assist is absolutely invaluable. There is no one way to plan your travels. There's no right or wrong way. Go ahead, do what you need to do, but be aware that either way, you're paying for building the travel plan either with your time or someone else's time (if someone's

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planning the trip for you) or your money. Of course, we'll put all the details of our website resources, Facebook group, and Danielle Oteri's details in our detailed show notes for this episode at untolditaly.com/195.

Katy

Thank you to all of you who listen and enjoy the show, and especially to those of you who send beautiful messages of support, thanks, and encouragement, and leave heartwarming reviews. They truly mean the world to our team. Hearing that we played some small part in helping you have an amazing trip to Italy is exactly why we do what we do.

Katy

That's all for today. Next week, we're going to delve into the wonderful world of Italian red wine. But until then, it's Ciao for now!