

Untold Italy Episode 200: More than Nutella - A Tasty Look at Italian Chocolate

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 200.

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. Can you believe that today is our 200th episode of Untold Italy? Hooray! Pop the prosecco! I'm actually pinching myself because I had no idea that when I started this journey back at the end of 2019 that it would still be going to this day.

So to celebrate I'm going to tell you all about Italian chocolate - my favorite brands and styles, where to find and taste it, and all the things. Because Italians do chocolate very, very well but somehow it flies under the radar compared with Swiss or Belgian chocolate - I have no idea why! Probably marketing. But we'll get to that later along with some gift ideas for the upcoming holidays and tips on making the most of the Black Friday sales as there are always plenty of travel deals on offer.

But first a little background on this podcast and why I'm so proud to reach this milestone of 200 episodes. As I mentioned, the podcast was a little idea hatched with my friend Josie in late 2019. The first episode launched in January 2020, just a few short weeks before covid first happened. And then boy did it happen and travel abroad was the last thing anyone was thinking of. At that time Italy was right at the epicenter of the crisis and things took a very dark turn there, and in fact, in many ways, it was much worse there than many of us experienced in our own countries.

And at that point, I really did wonder - should I continue? but I'm so glad I did.

During those horrible Covid days, we kept recording and beaming our little piece of Italy around the world to anyone who would care to listen. And I know there are many of you who have been with me from the start. To those people especially I so appreciate you and your support, and being with me through those dark days.

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Over many weeks and now years I've talked to countless amazing people, mainly women, from around Italy and the world who all share a passion for Italy. Friendships, collaborations and partnerships have been formed that are an integral part of my life these days.

I'm so thrilled that the podcast inspires the travels of many people but also helps support talented people in Italy and their fledgling businesses.

So out of big challenges come beautiful things and I can honestly say this podcast has changed my life. And that's in no small part due to all of you listeners. I know I speak for our whole team here at Untold Italy when I say we truly appreciate all of you, your positive support and suggestions coming in from across the globe.

Fun fact - did you know that most of our listeners are from North America over 75% actually - a big shout out to you all and a happy Gday to my loyal Aussie listeners. Wherever you are listening from Miami, or Melbourne, Mumbai or Marrakech it's a pleasure and honor to have you join us.

Speaking of the team. A big shout out to my podcast crew, Katie and Mark who keep everything ticking over week on week. Having bootstrapped my way through the early days of the pod on my own, I can honestly say there is no way I would have continued without this dream team. Grazie mille guys - you're the best!

Big thanks also go to Olivia and Andrea, Tyla, Rhianna, Carrie, Doris, Mark, Kristen, Valerie, Ailsa and Clare and our new team members Cristie and Niki for keeping the whole Untold Italy universe spinning! We could not do this without you.

Ok, I did promise you some chocolate or cioccolato and I really don't like to disappoint especially when it comes to chocolate - so let's jump into my mini guide to Italian chocolate - just in time for end-of-year celebrations of all kinds!

Firstly, let's just say Italians are not so good at marketing their fine chocolate. It's a bit like their amazing wine - you know some varieties like Chianti, Prosecco and Barolo but the average consumer needs to dig quite hard to find out about other varieties.

Sure we all know Nutella the delicious chocolate hazelnut spread and Ferrero Rocher those delicious balls of crunchy nutty chocolatey goodness but I guess most of us scratch our heads when we try to think of any other Italian chocolate brands or experiences. But here's the thing. The Italians do chocolate, like most other things, very very well.

Take a hot chocolate beverage for example. Where I'm from and in most places I've tried it around the world, the milk-to-chocolate ratio is very firmly weighted to the milk side of the equation. In Italy a proper cioccolato caldo is exactly what it says on the box - hot chocolate - very thick and very chocolatey and there's definitely way more chocolate than milk. My

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children never say no to a hot chocolate for breakfast in Italy because when you know, you know.

If you want a more sophisticated take on hot chocolate then you'll need to head to the northern region of Piedmont and the capital Turin or Torino. This is the home of the ultimate hot chocolate drink known as Bicerin. It's actually not just chocolate but layers of espresso coffee, chocolate and whipped cream and it is as decadent as it sounds. Tempting as it may be to mix all these layers together (I was thinking tiramisu obviously with that combo) you actually need to drink it through the layers. I tried Bicerin earlier this year and it was delicious and the perfect afternoon pick me up.

The region of Piedmont is where arguably all the best chocolate in Italy comes from. It's here that you'll find the major factories for Ferrero makers of Nutella and Ferrero Rocher. And that's due to the abundance of hazelnuts growing in the region and also a key ingredient in those sweet treats.

There's definitely a time and place in my life for Nutella and Ferrero but if you want to try a true Italian chocolate delicacy you'll need to head back into Torino town and visit the atelier of Guido Gobino where you'll find soooo many magnificent creations. They are best known for Giandujotto and Gianduja which are basically Nutella on steroids or very very seriously good chocolate.

Only the very best melt-in-the-mouth chocolate is blended with hazelnuts. I defy you to eat just one of these little morsels because it's absolutely impossible. The creation of these sweets dates back to the Napoleonic era and are definitely fit for a King or Queen which is no doubt who they were made for. Remember your history! Turin was home to the Kings and Queens of Savoy and the first king of Italy.

Of course, we stop off at Gobino and learn more about their treasured sweets during our Piedmont tour which is definitely an experience chocolate lovers will enjoy. You could also do a chocolate crawl of sorts and visit artisan makers with centuries of experience Guido Castagna, Peyrano and Caffarel. The tasting experience and how they wrap your purchases is all part of the extraordinary chocolate time you will have in Turin. Hmm, don't mind if I do! But don't worry if you can't wait to try these yummy chocolates when you're in Italy, if you're in the US you can also buy Gobino on Amazon. Not joking. We'll add the link to our show notes.

You may have heard of this popular Italian brand that also began in Turin in the 19th century because you'll find it in most cities in Italy including the airport in Rome and in destinations around the world. Venchi is famous for chocolate and gelato and they are of course an irresistible combination. While it may not have the artisanal qualities of the other places we mentioned in Turin, it's undeniably excellent quality and hard to resist. I have to admit I always allow my kids one last Venchi gelato when we depart from Rome - it doesn't really matter what time it is. It's gelato o'clock somewhere in the world right?

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Heading east from Turin, northern Italy has chocolate on its mind. I love the old-school charm of Zaini in Milano. And the innovation of Vizio Virtu in Venice - thanks to Monica for sharing that one with me. In Genoa, they know chocolate too. There are so many historic sweet stores to explore but the famous one at easter time for the best chocolate eggs in town are to be found at Romeo Viganotti. Chocolate is such a serious business here.

But also... in Sicily... Hang on a minute, but Sicily is the home of cannoli and granita. There's no chocolate there. Oh yes, there is. Head on over to the Val di Noto to Modica where Spanish domination in the 16th century brought Aztec cocoa beans and production methods to which the Sicilians liberally applied sugar - naturally. There was born a truly unique, stone ground and cold pressed grainy style of chocolate which is super delicious and very different to its smooth northern cousin. Modica chocolate is often flavored with cinnamon and vanilla and sometimes chili.

For the final stop on our Italian chocolate journey, we're headed back to the mainland to our beloved Umbria where you'll find Perugina - makers of the delightful Baci chocolates. Meaning kisses, Baci are a perfect hazelnut surrounded by cocoa and chopped hazelnuts covered in chocolate. If you haven't tried them, half the fun is opening up the silver wrapping with blue stars and reading the precious love note that comes with each and every chocolate.

Perugina has made many variations over the years including collaborations with fashion house Dolce and Gabbana but if you ask me the dark chocolate original created by Luisa Spagnoli over 100 years ago in 1922 are the best. To this day, hundreds of millions of baci have been sold around the world and if anyone's listening this simple pleasure is right at the top of my Christmas wish list.

Dedicated chocolate lovers might like to spend some time at Perugina's headquarters in Perugia Umbria. Here you can visit the Perugina museum and factory and also take a variety of chocolate-making classes.

Perugia is a city that nurtures chocolate lovers so you'll also find artisan chocolatiers like Augusta Perusia and the biggest drawcard of all, Europe's largest week-long chocolate festival - Eurochocolate held every October in the city. Interesting that they chose an Italian city to celebrate European chocolate and not a Swiss or Belgian one don't you think? Just saying! Of course, I am biased.

Anyway, rest assured that where we can we add a little chocolate stop on all our small group tour experiences. Apart from the personal indulgence and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that, Italian chocolates make great gifts and are the perfect little reminder of Italy.

Katy

So if you're looking for the chocolate brands and places I mentioned, head straight on over the show notes on our website at untolditaly.com/200 where they are all listed. We've also

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added our up-to-date Italy gift guide and link to our page sharing Black Friday deals relevant to those of you planning trips to Italy in 2024. Honestly, this is the very best time of year to book in advance if you want to take advantage of significant savings as I know this is the only discount some of these brands will offer. Start thinking about luggage, tours, accommodation, and experiences. If you are ready and can book you'll find deep discounts as well as flexibility to change your plans for those activities you want to book in advance. So stay tuned on our website at untolditaly.com/black-friday where we keep a track of all the relevant deals so you don't have to sign up to things and wade through your email.

And because we like to be helpful and share things you might find useful. 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 on our website too, 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 over these 200 episodes 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 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 and can't wait to make another 200 episodes!

That's all for today, on next week's episode we're back in Roma, the Eternal City because it's been way too long - but until then it's "ciao for now".