

Untold Italy Episode 202: Amazing Assisi - Hosting Travelers for Centuries

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 202.

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

Buongiorno everyone. Can you believe we're almost at the end of 2023? This year has zipped by so quickly it seems and here we are about to head into Christmas. It's been a huge year for Untold Italy and travel in Italy in general. All indications are this was one of, if not the busiest seasons for the Italian tourism industry since records began.

But, do you know where it wasn't so busy? Umbria. And that's where we headed today. We cannot fathom why Umbria isn't as busy as Tuscany but we like it that way. It's a beautiful, and peaceful corner of Italy where people just get on doing what they've always done for centuries. We just wrapped up our first tour there and I just loved what our guest Barbara had to say - I didn't feel like I was a tourist. I felt like a local visiting family and friends. Exactly how we feel and it's why we choose to vacation and celebrate special moments there ourselves.

But there is one place in Umbria that has seen a constant stream of visitors throughout the years and that's Assisi, the town we are visiting today. Joining me is Isabella Bellucci, a local guide from the Umbria region, here to tell us all about the beautiful town of Assisi and what you can expect if you decide to go there.

Most famous for being the birthplace of St Francis, patron saint of animals and ecology, Assisi has been a destination for pilgrims for many centuries. So let's take our own pilgrimage of sorts there now.

Katy

Welcome to Isabella. Welcome on to the Untold Italy podcast.

Isabella

Thank you, Katy, for your invitation. I'm so happy to be here.

Katy

I'm so happy to have you with us. I was just sharing with our listeners how much me and my colleagues here at Untold Italy love Umbria. It's such a special place, and you get to live and work there, lucky you. But before we get started about probably its most famous town, could you please introduce yourself to our guests and let them know about your passion for your region and what you do?

Isabella

Yeah, I was born in Perugia a long time ago, and I studied foreign languages. I graduated in linguistic mediation. I'm a translator and interpreter in Russian and German, actually. I worked for big companies until 1999. And then I decided to combine my passion for foreign languages with art. So I decided to become a tour guide. I've been working as a tour guide since 2001, and I love it. I'm still very passionate. I can say that. After 22 years of being a guide, I'm still very passionate.

Katy

What do you love about it?

Isabella

I love meeting people from the whole world. Every day, I meet different people. I like showing them the beauties of my region. I think I'm a people person. I like sharing art, culture, food, wine with them.

Katy

Amazing. I know how much you love Umbria, and I won't get you to pick a favorite town just yet, but we're going to talk about probably the most famous town in your region, which is Assisi. Let's explain to everyone, we're where exactly is Assisi so they can get a picture in their mind about where in Italy it is.

Isabella

First of all, Assisi is right in the middle of Umbria. Umbria is nestled in Italy. It's one of the 20 regions. And as a very famous historian, Giacomo di Bedi said, It's an island without the sea. So we don't have any exit on the sea, but we have a beautiful lake, many rivers. We have a green sea because we are surrounded by rolling hills, mountains, fields. And Assisi is the most visited one. It's usually visited by four million tourists every year. It's the native town of a very famous Saint, St. Francis and also of St. Clare. So it's the spiritual heart of Umbria. Actually, Umbria could be considered the spiritual and mystic heart of Italy because the most important saints were born there, St. Benedict, St. Scolastica, Saint Rita. And if you're a romantic people, you celebrate St. Valentine, who was born there. We are really in a mystical area, mystical region.

Isabella

Assisi is a master because it's also the place where the best, the most talented artists worked in between the 13th and the 14th centuries, such as Giotto from Florence, considered by many the forerunner of the Renaissance.

Katy

Yeah, it's a beautiful town. I mean, Umbria really is the green heart, and it's like hiding in plain sight, isn't it? Between Rome and Florence, and you've got Tuscany on the side. People just somehow, they might go to a city if they're very lucky, but 4 million people, visitors, it sounds like a lot, but overall, in how many people visit Italy, it's probably not that many. But why do people go to Assisi? What's the history behind it?

Isabella

So Assisi was founded by the Umbrians, first of all. The Umbrians are considered the very first, the oldest people who settled in Italy. Pliny the Elder, the famous Latin historian said that gents antiquissimae, the oldest people. And they gave the name to my area. They founded cities such as Spoleto and Narni, the famous Roman colony of Narni. Assisi later became a Roman municipality and famous travelers, the Grand tour travelers such as Goethe used to go to Assisi to admire one of the best preserved Roman temples, so the Minerva temple, which is still to be seen in the main square of Assisi. We have a lot of Roman vestigia or ruins, such as two Roman houses decorated with magnificent mosaics. That's the reason why somebody said that Assisi could be considered the Umbrian Pompeii.

Isabella

So Assisi is, of course, famous, as I said before, for the presence of the body of St. Francis, this founder of the first Mendiccan order in the world, the Order of the Franciscan Friars. He was a very rich man. He was a bourgeois man. He belonged to the bourgeoisie, the middle class. He wanted to raise the social scale, so he joined the army in 1202. But he was taken prisoner. He stayed in jail in Perugia for one year. When he came back home, he was very confused, he didn't know what to do, and he popped into an abandoned church. He heard Jesus' voice who told him, Francis, don't you sit at my house, it's in ruins. Go and rebuild it. He misunderstood these words initially, he rebuilt churches like a mason, and a few years later, he got the real meaning of these words. So he had to moralize. He had to rebuild the Catholic Church. So he became the first maybe reformer of the Catholic Church. He moralized the spiritual church.

Katy

So there was some things going on in the church that were maybe not so pure, shall we say, that needed to be reformed?

Isabella

It was secularized. It was a secularized church. The church was experiencing a very deep spiritual crisis and needed to be renovated. So he renewed the Catholic Church. He was immediately made a saint after he died. And on top of his tomb, they built a shrine of art. So it's not only the venue of a religious revolution, but also of an artistic revolution. That's where famous artists such as Cimabue, Simone Martini, Pietro Lorenzetti broke out with the Byzantine art. So Assisi is also the right place for art lovers, not only for pilgrims.

Katy

Yeah, because it's always been on the pilgrim route, hasn't it? Yeah. It's been welcoming visitors for centuries going to see the body of St. Francis. But there's many other things that you can see and do in the Assisi.

Isabella

Yes, for sure.

Katy

I think that's the first place where people go, isn't it? They go, and maybe it's the only place that they go in Assisi. They might go to the cathedrals.

Isabella

Yeah, which is a shame. I mean, it's a shame, no, it's a pity.

Katy

But maybe let me tell everyone about the cathedrals, and then we can tell them about all the other wonderful things you can do there.

Isabella

Yeah, we have a basilica. It's a basilica, but made of two superimposed churches. We have the lower part built in only two years. Francis died in 1226. He was made a saint two years after. The day after his canonization, the same Pope, Gregor IX, blessed the cornerstone of that basilica, which was finished, the lower part, in just two years, 1230, when Francis could be buried in there. Then they had to interrupt its building because the follower of St. Francis was excommunicated.

Katy

Why was that?

Isabella

Because he was too close to the worst enemy of the Pope, the German Emperor, Frederick II of Swabia, who was actually a good guy. He was a good Christian. He was the only one who conquered Jerusalem without using weapons, without using violence.

Katy

Oh, how did he do it?

Isabella

Thanks to his diplomatic skills, he knew Arab, and he had in his entourage in his court, Jews, Muslims, and Christians peacefully living together. My goodness. He gave them the same rights. This is what we all should do now.

Katy

Yeah, I was just about to say, where's Frederick II when you need him?

Isabella

Yes, I'm still in love in him. I'm in love in a man who died in 1250.

Katy

I get it. Well, there's a lot to be admired about someone they can use their diplomatic skills to bring peace to so many people. I think that's an amazing role model to have, for sure. Is he good looking? Just to be really basic about it.

Isabella

Yeah, not bad.

Katy

In a 13th century way.

Isabella

He was married. His last wife was called, like me, Isabella.

Katy

Maybe you're the reincarnation. Who knows?

Isabella

Before, of course, Francis died, he appointed as his follower, this friar called Elias. Elias from Cortona. This friar was one of the, let's say, friends of Frederick II. He had very tight connections to the to the Emperor. He was the Germanic Emperor, Frederick II. And so as the

Pope hated him, he excommunicated the friar and the German Emperor. And that's why they had to interrupt building Francis, Basilica, which was later finished. So within 25 years, they built two huge churches, one on top of each other, two churches called Basilica. It's only one, Basilica of St. Francis. It's a papal one, belongs to the Vatican State. That's why many popes celebrated services in there. It's a papal Basilica.

Katy

It's pretty impressive when you go in there to see that it was built in 25 years when you think some other basilica is like maybe Sagrada Familia.

Isabella

Exactly. Not yet finished.

Katy

Not yet. It's a beautiful church, too. When you go down the underside of it, you go into the ancient part, don't you? Yes. It's a very beautiful church. Even if you are not religious, it's very moving.

Isabella

Exactly. I always say it's spiritual. You feel a special energy, especially in the lower parts. The lower part invites people to meditate.

Katy

I agree. Yeah.

Isabella

It's completely different. They are completely different from each other. The lower part is Romanesque, not very elongated, very dark. It symbolizes the death. The upper part is very high, elongated, plainly of light. So it represents the Easter mystery. So for people who believe it, that's the death and the resurrection. But anyway, it's an important place also for art lovers. It's a museum. You can see the evolution of art.

Katy

What's your favorite piece inside the basilica there?

Isabella

I like the lower part where Francis is depicted next to the Virgin Mary, and Mary is doing this gesture. She's pointing. I always say she's like Italians. She speak with her body. That's a very innovative gesture. The Virgin Mary is not - like usually depicted holding baby Jesus, looking at him. She's pointing with her buddy, Francis. So these are speaking gestures. That's the artistic revolution which took place in that church in between the 13th and the 14th centuries.

Katy

Yeah, amazing. It's a really beautiful place. I'm not religious myself, but I could spend a long time..

Isabella

Neither am I. I'm very spiritual. I'm very spiritual, but not religious.

Katy

But you can feel, like you said, a different energy in there. Obviously, with the people, the artists that painted that were obviously feeling some energy too, because it is a different... If you compare it to somewhere like St. Peter's or some of the other big churches, it feels a lot more personal. It feels a lot more intimate that you could have a more personal relationship with God or whoever you believe in or whatever you believe in. I can understand why people come there, even if they're not religious, because you can get a really interesting sense of peace when you're there.

Isabella

Francis is considered a universal saint. He talked to the Egyptian Sultan during the Fifth Crusade. He wanted to demonstrate that it's possible to live with Muslims, and he did that. He didn't want to convert anybody. He is beloved by everybody, by all confessions, all religions.

Katy

Yeah. He was just focused on love, was it? And spreading peace and generosity and love. Yeah.

Isabella

Exactly. He used to preach universal values such as peace, respect for everybody, for the nature, for the animals.

Katy

Yeah, Yeah.

Isabella

So Assisi is the symbol of the capital of peace in the world. And that's where John Paul II, you were too young, I think in 1986, John Paul II invited to Assisi, the Dalai Lama and the representatives of all religions in the world. They all went there and prayed together for peace. So that was the very first eco-medical meeting for peace, 1986.

Katy

Might be if we should have another one this year. We need it. We need it. Yeah, exactly. Now, Isabella, you mentioned there's another, apart from St. Francis, there's another Saint that is famous from Oessie. Who is that one?

Isabella

It's St. Clare. St. Clare - Chiara in Italian. She was a noble woman. Women had only two chances in their life. They could either get married or become a nun. And Clare, when she was only 19, she gave up all her worldly goods. She renounced her father's inheritance and decided to go in the footsteps of St. Francis. She actually wanted to help the poor, visit the lepers, the sick, like Francis, like the Franciscans. But as she was a woman, she had to accept compromise with the Catholic Church. So she had to be cloistered. Meaning she was not permitted to stay outside her monastery. And we still have in Assisi, 38 nuns living in the first monastery dedicated to St. Clare, 38 nuns.

Katy

Are they all Italian or are they from around the world?

Isabella

No, we have a few foreigners, too.

Katy

What's she known for? You know how St. Francis is the patron Saint of animals and ecology. What's Clare known for?

Isabella

It's not actually an Italian tradition, but in Spain, in South America, when people get married, they pray St. Clare to have good weather for the wedding. The friend that we have in common, she has to pray St. Clare now.

Katy

One of our colleagues is getting married in Umbria next year, and we need to get her to pray to St. Clare. Exactly. She's the patron Saint of the weather. You know what? Where I live, sometimes the temperature drops by 15 degrees in two minutes, so I think we need St. Clare too.

Isabella

Well, she performed many miracles, actually, many miracles.

Katy

Assisi, it's got this whole religious and spiritual legacy. But what else is there about Assisi? When I was there last year, we got there fairly late in the afternoon and we missed a lot of things. I feel like I do need to go back. But even just when you walk out of the basilica and you walk up the hill and you can see the surrounding countryside, and it's a breathtaking view, it really is. But I'm sure there's much more to Assisi than views and the basilica. What else can we do there?

Isabella

Well, you can stroll around. You can visit these narrow alleys. I call them alleys, narrow streets, decorated with beautiful flowers like in the nearby Spello.

Isabella

And then I don't know, maybe they could also taste the local specialties, such as the cookies Francis wanted to have before he died, the so-called mostaccioli. Do you know that Francis wrote a letter to a woman? He had a woman as a friend called Jacopa de Settesoli. And he had a very special relation to her. When he was feeling that the time of his dad was close, he wrote her a letter asking her to bring him the cookies he liked so much, the mostaccioli. And this woman is the only one which could be buried inside his grave, the only woman whose remains are still to be found in his tomb. Jacopa de Settesoli. She, actually he wrote her a letter calling her, brother Jacopa. Frate Jacopa. Please come to the Porziuncola Chapel where he was brought before he died. Please come to the Porziuncola Chapel and bring me some tissues, linen tissues I would like to be covered with. And please bring me the cookies I like so much.

Isabella

The mostaccioli made with must. Must is when you squeeze the grapes before the fermentation, you have a grape juice called mosto in Italian. And so he wanted to have his most beloved cookies before dying, mostaccioli. She's very in there. He had a very special relationship to her.

Katy

What a beautiful story. I think he seems like so human. When you tell the story, it's.

Isabella

Like- Yes, so human. Exactly. That's a human part of Francis that he unveiled only maybe to his best friends, to his closest friends.

Katy

Such a beautiful and simple thing to ask for when you're having your last breaths is your favorite cookies. I think maybe if we spend time with people that are in their last days of life.

I remember my own grandmother, I remember something that she asked for and was similar to that. It's a beautiful thing.

Isabella

His last desire.

Katy

Have you tasted them? Do they still make them in Assisi?

Isabella

Yeah, I taste it, especially during the vintage. During the vintage, when you have the must grape juice, you make the mostaccioli. You can still find them in many bakeries.

Katy

Are there many bakeries in Assisi that you can go to? Is there a favorite one?

Isabella

Yeah, there are. Yes, there are two, three bakeries in Assisi. Sensi is one of the best.

Katy

Thinking about the geography of Assisi, because it's right up on the hill, right? But the main car park, if you're a visitor, if you come into the town, or I'm assuming if you come by bus, if you're coming from Perugia?

Isabella

Yeah, exactly. If you come by bus from Perugia, you get right to the town, exactly. Right below the Basilica is a big parking lot where busses can arrive. From there, it's just five minutes walking. Or you can arrive by train and then take a taxi or a bus, and you can go all the way up to the Basilica of St. Clare, and then you can do the visit from the top all the way down, walking down the hill.

Katy

I think that sounds probably like a good idea because I feel like most people are going to come to that main parking lot and then go to see the two basilicas, maybe walk a few streets around and then go out.

Isabella

I usually suggest to start from the top. You could also start from the very top of the town, from the Roman era, from the Roman district, Perlici district, where the layout of the amphitheater is still to be seen. You can still see the oval-shaped layout of the arena, of the Roman amphitheater. But the amphitheater is no more to be seen because they're built on top.

Katy

Yeah, as usual. Recycling.

Isabella

Yeah, as usual. They recycled. Exactly, they recycled.

Katy

It's a really interesting thing because I was just thinking, Well, if you look at Google Maps, you don't get this sense of the height or the levels of the town? No. It's pretty steep, people, I'm telling you. I think it's a very good idea to start at the top, having walked up. Exactly. If you start at the top, then you can walk downhill and maybe stop off for your mostaccioli cookies along the way.

Isabella

Exactly, or gelato.

Katy

Most people, would they come? Let's just say they were coming from Rome because you can do it as a day trip from Rome, can't you?

Isabella

Yeah, you can. Or you could take a train from Rome. Now we have very fast trains. So in two hours, you get to the city from Rome. And then from the train station, you take a bus or a taxi. So in two hours and a half, you are in a city.

Katy

So just to describe this town, it's a typical town, isn't it, from Umbria? So Umbria is really known for the hilltop towns that are made of stone and cobbled streets, and people are really proud of their environment, and they love to plant pot plants with lots of colorful flowers. And so you have this beautiful town, which I think is pretty unique in Umbria as well, with the Roman ruins and the basilica. It's got a lot of things happening there. You could easily spend half a day at least exploring.

Isabella

Yeah, if you like hiking, if you are an adventurer, you could also walk from the highest part of Assisi all the way up to the Hermitage of the Prisons, which is a great spiritual place where Francis used to meditate, to go and meditate. And there's a nice hiking trailer where you can stop, enjoy the view, see the olive groves.

Katy

The typical Umbrian view because they're just the olive groves. When I think of Umbria, I think of olive groves, I think of sunflowers.

Isabella

Vineyards, sunflowers, poppies.

Katy

Yeah, it's so beautiful. There's lots of nice restaurants as well in Assisi where you can go. I remember we stopped and had dinner just looking at the sun setting down over these beautiful hills because you're up so high, you can see everything all around you, and it's just a stunning view. Of course, because like most places in Italy, most people just come for the day and then they leave. So in the evening time, it was absolutely beautiful because it wasn't very busy and you can just taste all that delicious, Umbrian food, which I don't know, people don't know so much, but they should.

Isabella

We have a great reputation for cured meat, for salami, a very flavourful prosciutto, sausages. So these are called Norcineria. Norcineria. Because the tradition comes from Norcia. Norcia is the native town of St. Benedict, and that's where they start curing meats. I think one of the delicacies they should try is the prosciutto. Prosciutto from Norcia is different from the parma or different from the other ones. And in general, the cured meats, the norcineria. They should taste Norcineria - cured meats with cheeses and olive oil. That's our yellow gold. They cannot miss olive oil. Umbrian olive oil is considered one of the best.

Katy

Yeah, so is the Norcineria. Because it's really famous in Italy. There's people will go out of their way to get this particular cured meat. Umbria is good at a lot of things, but it's not so good at marketing.

Isabella

I admit it's true. We are starting now. We are starting now doing serious marketing. The region of Umbria is investing now some money in commercial, in marketing. I don't know if you had the chance to see the last two commercials by a marketing studio from Milan, Testa. Studio Testa from Milan is considered the best in Italy. They really made two interesting and well-done commercials about Umbria. They haven't been translated, I think, in English, but they are excellent, really excellent.

Katy

I'm so happy to hear that because, sadly, I think, unfortunately, a lot of the marketing that comes to the English-speaking audience does not showcase some of this amazing heritage that you have in your region and in other regions of Italy, unfortunately, I need to be careful what I say, but it's not very creative, let's just say.

Isabella

You're right. No, you're right. The last two ones have been creative, quite creative.

Katy

That's excellent. I think it's such an amazing region that's so undervalued for some reason. In that way, I really love it because when you go there, you don't feel like you're a part of a big crowd. You feel like you're experiencing life and you feel like you're experiencing... Life has it's been for a long time because... Someone was telling me, another guide was mentioning to me that with Umbria, because it's landlocked, there haven't been so many foreign influences over the cuisine, over the way of life. It could always be said that it's quintessentially Italian, like the ultimate Italian. Because when we talk about Sicily, which I really find exciting as well, is that there's been so many different influences. But here maybe you find the pure Italy. Yeah. Around the city, there's so many other things to do too, isn't there? I mean, it's not far from Perugia, which is a really nice town, but there's also vineyards that you can visit. Someone told me about a picnic that you can do in the vineyard.

Isabella

Not far from Assisi is a winery. They are very smart because they created this kind of a picnic in the valley and overlooking the town. You can see Assisi while you are having your picnic. It's nice, nice experience.

Katy

Is that Sao Assisi?

Isabella

It's called Saio. Saio means tunic, means robe.

Katy

Oh.

Isabella

El Saio, in San Francesco, is the tunic of St. Francis.

Katy

Very clever. That's that. So that's the name of the winery, the tunic of St. Francis.

Isabella

In Assisi, you could also have some Italian classes. So if you want to learn Italian, there's a school where you can study Italian language.

Katy

I think that would be a beautiful place to learn it, though, because you would really... I think there's not too many distractions there.

Isabella

No distractions, no disco. No. If you want to learn Italian, the right venue would be Perugia. Perugia is the place where they founded the very first university for foreigners in Italy in 1926.

Katy

That's another beautiful spot. Now, is there anything else that you would like to tell us about Assisi that you think we should know?

Isabella

Well, I would suggest to do the tour of the Roman ruins, Roman Vestigia, such as the two Roman houses painted with frescoes and decorated with mosaics. They could visit also the underground Roman Forum, the Minerva temple, Roman temple, and the area of the amphitheater. That's something they could do in, so it's not only about religion.

Katy

Also there's a castle?

Isabella

Yeah, there's a castle, a huge castle, a fortress, a papal fortress, which has just been renovated. They could either walk or take a minibus, electric mini bus, and inside they can do a tour of the castle and see amazing views of the valley. They can see all the way to Spoleto, they can see Perugia, they can see the whole Umbrian Valley.

Katy

Sounds like a pretty strategic spot for the popes.

Isabella

That was the place where the Popes troops had been living until 1860 because we were under the power of the Pope until 1860.

Katy

But has it seen much conflict, Umria, or has it been fairly peaceful for a long time?

Isabella

No, always fighting. We were always fighting.

Katy

Between different towns?

Isabella

Between different towns. And also we used to have internal fights, rivalries between like Romeo and Juliet's families. In Assisi, for example, the upper part was fighting against the lower parts. And we are now reenacting these rivalries in a magnificent festival. It's a medieval festival called Calendimaggio, which takes place on the first weekend of May. That's something they should also enjoy.

Katy

Yeah. What happens in the festival? I love the festivals. Everyone who listens to this podcast knows how much I love an Italian festival.

Isabella

People are dressed up in medieval costumes. They have parades. There's a choral contest. They compete with choirs. They elect the most beautiful woman, Madonna Primavera, and they reenact typical medieval daily scenes. There's a jury which is going to elect the best part, in Italian, the upper and the lower part. It's not a district. We don't have like in Siena district. We have. The upper and the lower parts.

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Katy

It's a 50 % chance you can win. 50 % of the people are going to be happy, everyone else is crying.

Isabella

Exactly.

Katy

But I think this is really lovely about Umbria because you have that. It's very strong on, if you think about Tuscany is very strong on the Renaissance side of things. Umbria is very medieval. Everything is like a...

Isabella

Very medieval, yes. And I would suggest not to go in summer, but also in winter. I suggest to go in winter because, for example, for Christmas, they're going to see these beautiful churches illuminated with special lights. It's a video mapping. So they project the famous frescoes painted by Giotto and Cimabue on the facade of old churches. Then they place in front of the church a complex of statues connected to the frescoes. They are transmitting video mapping. It's something special.

Katy

I really feel like this is another marketing opportunity, let's just say, for Italy because there's so many places in Switzerland and Austria and Germany that don't really talk about their Christmas markets. But what Italy does brilliantly at Christmas time is the illuminations or the projections of these beautiful lights onto the buildings. I can imagine - having seen Assisi at nighttime without the illuminations, which was pretty special, actually, in itself. I can imagine it's very, very beautiful, actually.

Isabella

Yes. They could also enjoy one of the many alive, Nativity scenes. So Nativity scenes or Christmas treasures, I don't know how you call them in Australia, made of people, real people. You have a baby boy, you have Mary Joseph, the shepherds, you have really great

alive Nativity scenes. Oh, my goodness. Christmas time is, I think, one of the best times to come.

Katy

Would that start around the eighth of December?

Isabella

Yes, starting from the 8th of December until the arrival of the Maggi, so January the 6th.

Katy

Look, I just think everyone, listen, because summer is not always the best time to visit Italy, I think. This is a really great example. We love to go when we're going on our tours in Umbria in spring and fall because of the flowers and because of the olive harvest. But here we have a situation at Christmas time. And if you can only go at that time of year, my goodness, I've got to say, Umbria and food is made for winter. You have the porchette.

Isabella

Exactly. I forgot to mention the porchetta, the best street food.. They are going to excommunicate me as Umbrian.

Katy

You'll have to go and pray to St. Francis or Prince Frederick.

Isabella

Exactly. I need an indulgence now. I need an indulgence.

Katy

A porchette is the perfect thing for the indulgence.

Isabella

Yeah, porchetta. How can you forget porchetta?

Katy

You cannot. It is very delicious. It's not just a pork roast. It's the ultimate pork roast you've ever had in your life. I don't know. You just have to try. You just have to go there and try it. You'll have to go there and try it. Isabela, this has been such a lovely chat. If our listeners want to learn more about Assisi and Umbria, stay in touch with you and perhaps join you on one of your amazing tours. How can they do that?

Isabella

Well, you could visit my website, www.tourguideumbria.it or com or my Facebook page, which bears the same name, Isabella Bellucci, tour guide, Umbria. But in my website, you can find many suggestions about my sensational Umbria, about Assisi and many other towns and hamlets because we are considered the region of a hundred hamlets, borghi.

Katy

I love that word, borghi.

Isabella

Le cento borghi.

Katy

Grazie mille, Isabella. Thank you for taking us to Assisi and for joining us on Untold Italy today.

Isabella

Grazie, Katy, and arrivederci in Umbria.

Katy

Arrivederci.

Isabella

Ciao.

Katy

You know what listeners, the best bit about my job is meeting guides like Isabella who are so passionate about where they are from and share their stories so enthusiastically. It's actually not too hard to be passionate about Umbria I think. Maybe it hasn't had a lot of flashy marketing campaigns, famous wines and huge art collections but I do think it has something even more special. A genuine style of hospitality and a connection to the land that surpasses the Italian norm. Maybe that is the legacy of St Francis or perhaps it was there long before he came along. Whatever the reason, Umbria is a place you should all consider visiting as it truly is a special region worth exploring.

Of course, we take small groups to Assisi and other towns in Umbria to discover their very special kind of hospitality, take part in their local festivals and enjoy the delicious regional food and wine. To learn more about that you can head on over to our show notes at untolditaly.com/202 and get all the details of the tour and places Isabella mentioned. Of course, you'll find Isabella's details there too if you'd like to get in touch.

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. If you're using Apple podcasts then you need to go to the show page for Untold Italy - not the episode page - and scroll down until you see "ratings and reviews" You can leave your 5-star review and message there.

Next week on Untold Italy we're celebrating our 200th episode. Not bad for travel podcast that started in the pandemic.

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