

Untold Italy Episode 205: Best Ever Tips for your 2024 Italy Trip

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 205.

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. I hope you had a lovely festive season with lots of fun, feasting, family and friends. And a generous slice of two of panettone! I'm wondering if any of you decided to finally take that trip to Italy over your Christmas lunch and are ready to start researching and booking your trip.

Having been in the travel industry for quite some time, the days after Christmas show an incredible boost in activity as people plan their adventures for the year to come. It's definitely a great time to start planning and getting your ideas in motion because, I don't know about you, but the weeks fly by and before you know it you're packing your bags and heading to the airport.

So today I'm going to give you my top 10 tips for getting organized with your Italy trip planning for 2024 including some ways you can fast track those activities and also access all our very best recommendations. Of course, we share a lot here on the podcast and on our website but they are not personalized to you or your trip so if you want to know how you can access our expertise relevant to you and your trip, you'll need to listen for a few more minutes while I run through these important ideas for making your trip runs smoothly.

At this time I'm making sure I tap into my own advice because apart from a trip over to Rome and Venice in February/March, I'm also planning a visit in peak season for a very special wedding in June. It's bound to be very busy and hot then so listen up and I'll tell you what I have planned.

Katy

OK, if you're a long-time listener of the podcast you'll know that I'm an advocate of being super organized and booking in advance. And sorry to sound like a broken record but unfortunately having seen a lot of disappointed people on our Italy Travel Planning community on Facebook I do feel like I need to repeat and repeat again.

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One. Get organized and book now if you haven't already. Italy is one of the most popular places in the world to visit so if you have your heart set on a particular hotel or activity and you're traveling between Easter and the end of October I would book those now.

The most popular places to visit are Rome, Florence, Venice, the Amalfi Coast, Sorrento, parts of Tuscany, Capri and the Cinque Terre. Be careful of day trips to these places because you're likely going to be stuck in transit with 1000s of other people. Instead, stay overnight, linger a little longer and you'll catch these places at their best.

Also, let's remember the Olympics are on in Paris in 2024 in July and August so it's likely travelers to the event will extend their trips around Europe including Italy - I know I would.

Two. Build in buffer time. Again, in the peak seasons make sure you've built in plenty of buffer time into your itinerary to account for delays in transportation and availability of taxis etc. It's well known that there are simply not enough taxis or a comparable Uber service in Rome and Florence as there are in other major cities around the world. If you're concerned about making your onward journeys stay close to where you need to be the following day eg the airport or train station or book a transfer. Your hotel will usually have a company they work with that can assist with that.

Italian Airports are also very busy particularly before 11 am when most of the larger international flights depart so make sure you get there with plenty of time to check in particularly if you are traveling in coach or economy class.

Personally, I find all the transit activity a bit stressful so try to minimize it for my own trips. The best way to do that is by spending 3-4 days in a place because if you're doing a lot of transfers and checking in and out of hotels you're just missing out on exploring and enjoyment time.

Katy

Three. Don't follow the herd - forge your own path. I think we've moved on from a checklist of sights to checklists of experiences - cooking classes, food tours, wine tasting, golf cart tours etc.

There are so many things you can see and do, you can literally spend 1000s on activities so choose those that bring you the most joy. Cooking classes are fun if you like cooking.. If you don't. Probably skip them; same with boat tours - no point forcing yourself to do something if it makes you ill.

Back to cooking classes - Choose a class that teaches you dishes you're likely to cook and are from the region you're visiting. If you want to learn carbonara, do that in Rome as that's where it's from. If you're keen on pizza making - do that in Naples where you'll find the

world champions. I would say a standalone tiramisu class is not worth it as it is a very simple recipe.

Katy

Four. Mix up your experiences - not everything needs to be an organized activity. One of the best things I did in Rome this year was take an early morning walk around the major sites before grabbing a coffee at a favorite cafe. These sights and that walk never gets old, even if you've seen them 100s of times. I also like going for a wander around Trastevere or in Florence deep into the Oltrarno district in search of excellent gelato. Out in the countryside or along the coast a hike over hills can be as relaxed or strenuous as you like and there are many many opportunities to do this in Italy, a country whose citizens are as interested in the great outdoors as they are about their food, wine, history and culture. And of course, you can combine all of this by wandering along an ancient Roman road, stopping to admire churches and castles and then enjoying a relaxing bite to eat and glass of wine at a local trattoria. And that's why we love Italy!

If you mix up your experiences you'll also appreciate everything on a much deeper level. I know even as a dedicated history lover and museum nerd I can get fatigued after a few days of solid immersion in art and culture

Now for my 5th tip. Another one that seems to come up regularly but it's surprising how little people plan for it... Plan on walking a lot.

You'll likely double as a minimum the steps you do at home and that's for a few reasons - not sitting at our desks, no choice but to walk, limited taxis and slow public transportation. I'm always surprised how easily I clock up 15,000 - 20,000 steps a day when I'm traveling in Italy.

If you're not used to walking a lot it's time to build up some stamina so you can enjoy your time in Italy as best you can. Even if you have mobility issues I strongly recommend pushing yourself a little harder so you're prepared for longer walks and uneven ground. My father bought walking sticks with him which were invaluable. And in fact. When he upgraded to 2 sticks instead of one he was much more agile.

Break in some sneakers too. There is nothing worse than hobbling about with blisters when you're on vacation. And yes sneakers are fine to wear in Italy. I think they are your best option during the day because of the amount of walking. I also have some comfy sandals for summer but sneakers are the go-to in cities and are suitable for any weather.

Katy

Which brings me to climate... Six. I think it's fairly obvious by now that where we live we can't predict the weather. And that's true for Italy too. The last few years have been unseasonably warm but also there have been torrential downpours on occasion. 2023 was hot from May to end of October in Rome and southern Italy - over 30 degrees centigrade. That's

comfortable if you're lounging by the sea but can be uncomfortable when you're out and about in the cities and exposed historic sites.

If you quickly become overheated and are bothered by too much sun and heat I think it's a good idea to plan your outdoor activities around the morning and early evening and leave gentle walks, shopping, napping and lounging in cafes for the middle of the day and as I said, that can be true from the start of May to October. So make sure you book tours and activities appropriately, and drink plenty of water and apply sunscreen when you're there. Our tour operator friends are quite concerned about the number of unprepared people visiting large sites like Pompeii and the Colosseum affected by heat and sunstroke. Don't let that be you! For those of you that enjoy the heat - lucky you - make the most of it! I'd also pack a light rain jacket whatever the season because these days you just never know.

Katy

Seven. Try somewhere new/different. Tip number 7 is to try something new or different especially if you're traveling on a classic Italian itinerary following the route from Rome, Florence and Venice. Yes we all want to see the classic sights like the Colosseum and Vatican museums but trust me, you'll get a thrill out of doing something your friends and family likely haven't heard of. Perhaps it's an incredible rooftop view in Rome, an amazing country restaurant where lunch is served late into the afternoon or a secret wine bar in Florence with amazing frescoes.

Take a detour, even if it is for a day to somewhere special and unique. Florence is well set up for this with great train links to lesser-known towns and cities under an hour away like Arezzo, Prato and Pistoia. Same with Naples - everyone goes to Pompeii, Capri or the Amalfi Coast but what about Caserta - a magnificent Palace, Herculaneum - another town destroyed by Vesuvius or Ischia - an island famous for its beautiful castle, seafood and thermal baths. Not only will these places delight you but you'll lessen the load on some of the popular sites that are struggling to cope with so many visitors. Which brings me to tip number 8.

Katy

Eight. Have a plan to deal with crowds in the popular places. So many people have been shocked at the crowds at Italy's major attractions this year and it's definitely been on a whole other level compared to previous years judging by official visitor numbers. We don't know if that's going to continue into 2024 but realistically, Italy is always going to be a popular destination so best to be prepared and if you're pleasantly surprised, take it as a win. We mentioned visiting lesser-known sites before but here are some other ways you can avoid crowds.

Stay overnight - you heard from my friend Holly who lives on Capri late last year that the island is swamped by day visitors. If you stay overnight you'll have the island to yourself from late afternoon to around 10 am the following day. And it's bliss. This is true for other places too like Positano and Ravello on the Amalfi Coast and the villages of the Cinque Terre. Of course, later in 2024, Venice is introducing a city tax for day visitors so they have this issue

too. Therefore, if you really want to experience popular places, stay overnight and enjoy them at their very best.

Get up early - I'm an early riser so am usually out and about by between 7 and 8 am which is a great time to experience cities and popular locations crowd-free. Things start to get really busy around 10 and stay that way well into the afternoon. In the case of the Trevi Fountain, you're looking at a 5-6 am start in peak season and it stays that way right up to midnight!

Book private tours and take advantage of early starts - crowds really squash your enjoyment of some of Italy's favorite sites. Hopefully, someone smart sorts out the situation at the Colosseum and Vatican Museums soon so everyone visiting can have an enjoyable experience however until they do, the services of a guide are invaluable - not only to hear the amazing stories and tales that bring these places to life but also in terms of sheer logistics. We'll be hearing from one of our favorite operators in these locations Liv Tours in a few episodes who have some suggestions.

Book restaurants in popular areas and cities - nothing worse than wandering around hungry and settling for terrible food. I am so surprised people wing it when they are in Rome or Amalfi Coast.

But the best tip of all, if you are adventurous and can see the benefit of going against the grain, is to venture away from the well-worn path, be that in Rome and the big cities or towards the countryside and regions of Italy where, if I'm honest, I always find the most joy if I take this approach.

Katy

Now here's a practical tip. Nine. Pay for trip insurance. I hope this doesn't happen to anyone listening, however, in my group of friends and family who traveled with us to Italy in September this year, there were 2 hospital visits. Both for very different reasons. Thankfully everything turned out ok and they were able to continue their journeys but not everyone is so lucky. A simple trip on a cobblestoned road can land you in hospital unable to resume your trip and needing to rearrange flights home and other logistics which always comes at a cost. And a big one if you need to be medically evacuated. That's a life-changing financial event if you don't have trip insurance to the tune of \$10,000s. We also had a guest on one of our tours need to return home for a family emergency. Booking last-minute flights and transfers is a costly exercise that can be covered by your insurance. So please make sure your trip is covered. It's usually a very small amount compared to the cost of your overall trip and so worth it.

Working out which one to buy can be really confusing so I'll leave some links to options in the show notes so you've got a starting point but make sure purchasing insurance is on your list of trip things to do.

Katy

Lastly. Ten. Get some help. Planning trips is fun for some people, and others find it extremely stressful and/ or you may not have time to spend hours scrolling through content on the internet, listening to podcasts or watching YouTube videos. And I have to say this form of travel research is something I do BUT with a huge disclaimer - having been in the travel industry for many years I know where to go to tap into expert resources that I trust.

And I'm going to be a bit blunt here, Just because someone made a couple of good-looking YouTube videos or Instagram posts does not make them an expert. Sorry, not sorry, these are not my favorite resources. Learning and building expertise in anything takes time and effort and I'm looking for people who have made mistakes, learned from them, gone back to the destination multiple times and looked at their travel experiences from several perspectives.

So do get some help. I always do when I'm going somewhere new. Even in Italy and especially the regions I'm not so familiar with. I always tap into my network because apart from getting insider access to the best things to do and places to eat, you can also learn valuable insights about logistics and planning. A great example of this was my recent trip to the Dolomites where I had some incredible support from friends and experts on the ground.

Katy

So how can you access this help? Well of course we have many podcasts and articles available on our website and on your favorite podcast apps. I have a team of people making sure the information is as up-to-date and correct as possible. So If you want to know the best place to stay in Rome, we have an article for that which is one of our most popular. We also have articles on how to buy Vatican Museum tickets and best agriturismo in Tuscany. You need to go to the search bar on our website untolditaly.com and type in your query and you'll generally find the answer. If it's not there let me know as we're always adding to our site and making amendments.

Of course, this podcast features guests with many many years of experience in many aspects of travel - from hyper-local experts in the 20 regions of Italy to tour operators and fellow travelers.

Now, If you're not a big fan of trawling through information we have some quick-fix options in the form of our digital travel guides and planners that summarise our best tips and recommendations for popular destinations in Italy. They are digital downloads you can access quickly and will give you a head start on all the trawling - restaurants, sights to visit etc. They are available on our shop and we'll put links into the show notes of course.

Katy

For those of you who want personalized assistance and access to our very favorite places to stay and visit (the ones we mainly share with family and friends) we have just launched our very own Untold Italy trip planning services. Our amazing team of Italy travel experts on the ground in Italy and around the world are ready to help you plan your dream Italian trip. You

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can choose from a service that helps you refine your itinerary or even help you start if you're completely overwhelmed. We'll advise on logistics and transport and get you all organized for an amazing time in Italy. And if you want a complete day-by-day itinerary plan we are offering that too. That would include mapping out a personalized itinerary for you including timing, activities and accommodation. This set of services has been a long time coming as we only wanted to offer them if we felt travelers could access maximum value for their Italy trips by engaging us. However, after some great feedback from our tour guests we're ready to open this up to a bigger audience

You can find out more and book in for a consultation on our website at

<https://untolditaly.com/services>.

Katy

So if you're traveling to Italy on your first trip, or a subsequent trip after a big long break or you're a regular visitor I hope you're getting excited about your upcoming travels and are ready to fall in love with beautiful Italia. I know many of you have been dreaming of these trips for the longest time and are bursting with excitement to get on the plane and start exploring.

Me too! I'll be there in a few weeks and I can't wait to go back to my favorite haunts in Rome, check in with my friends in Venice and of course uncover more exciting things to do, see and experience that I can share with you. We've got lots planned for the coming year so make sure to stay tuned.

In the meantime, I've put a link to our services and shop into the show notes on our website as well as all the tips I shared today. You'll find them at untolditaly.com/205 for episode 205.

We'd like to thank you for all your support of Untold Italy in 2023 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!

That's all for today, on next week's episode we're paying a visit to a gorgeous wine region in northern Italy that I was lucky enough to visit for the first time this year - but until then wishing you a Happy New Year as we welcome in 2024 and "ciao for now".